

An Anthem of Praise

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Bible Verse: Psalm 135
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Well, I know when we gather at the end of a workday, we often come a little fatigued, a little battered by the world perhaps; we have a wonderful Psalm to turn to tonight to lift our eyes toward heaven, Psalm 135, and I invite you to turn there with me. I want to read it as we begin in its entirety, all 21 verses of it, to kind of set it in your mind, refresh it in mind, and then let the Lord minister to us as he so faithfully does by his gracious spirit through his wonderful word.

Psalm 135, beginning in verse 1.

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; Praise Him, O servants of the LORD, 2 You who stand in the house of the LORD, In the courts of the house of our God! 3 Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely. 4 For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession. 5 For I know that the LORD is great And that our Lord is above all gods. 6 Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. 7 He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, Who brings forth the wind from His treasures. 8 He smote the firstborn of Egypt, Both of man and beast. 9 He sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, Upon Pharaoh and all his servants. 10 He smote many nations And slew mighty kings, 11 Sihon, king of the Amorites, And Og, king of Bashan, And all the kingdoms of Canaan; 12 And He gave their land as a heritage, A heritage to Israel His people. 13 Your name, O LORD, is everlasting, Your remembrance, O LORD, throughout all generations. 14 For the LORD will judge His people And will have compassion on His servants. 15 The idols of the nations are but silver and gold, The work of man's hands. 16 They have mouths, but they do not speak; They have eyes, but they do not see; 17 They have ears, but they do not hear, Nor is there any breath at all in their mouths. 18 Those who make them will be like them, Yes, everyone who trusts in them. 19 O house of Israel, bless the LORD; O house of Aaron, bless the LORD; 20 O house of Levi, bless the LORD; You who revere the LORD, bless the LORD. 21 Blessed be the LORD from Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

Now as we come to Psalm 135, I just want to refresh your memory just briefly about what we said about Psalm 134 because Psalm 134 and Psalm 135 are obviously verbally linked together. Psalm 134 was the concluding Psalm of the 15 series of Psalms known as the Psalms of Ascent, the Psalms that the pilgrims sang as they made their way to Jerusalem for the annual feasts, and Psalm 134, we saw, functions as a bridge to the final 16 Psalms, Psalms 135 through 150, which are predominantly Psalms of worship, and we see that there is a bridge taking place here, we see that they are linked together like a chain as you look at Psalm 134:1 where it says, "Behold, bless the LORD, all servants of the LORD, Who serve by night in the house of the LORD!" Well, you see those objects repeated in the opening two verses of Psalm 135 where it says, "Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; Praise Him, O servants of the LORD," just as in verse 1 in the prior Psalm, "You who stand in the house of the LORD," again echoing Psalm 134:1, "In the courts of the house of the LORD!" And so there are similar people being addressed and then in Psalm 134:3 we see this where it says, "May the LORD bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth." Compare that with the final verse of Psalm 135, verse 21, where it says, "Blessed be the LORD from Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!" And so Psalm 134 is connecting us, it is kind of launching us into the remainder of the psalter with what it said.

Now as you come to Psalm 135 and you look at it as a unit, what you find is that it begins and ends with a call to praise the Lord. Verse 1 of Psalm 135 again, three times it says it, "Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; Praise Him, O servants of the LORD." And the phrase that opens it, "Praise the LORD," in Hebrew it's hallelujah, that word that we know and use. It's hallelujah and so this is a Psalm of praise and that's reinforced by the way that it concludes again with the Hebrew phrase hallelujah, "Praise the LORD." And so it is bookended with "Praise the LORD" and everything that is in between is designed to undergird that call to praise and to help us praise the Lord. One of the wonderful things about this Psalm is how it lifts us out of our earthly circumstances, it lifts us away from the drumbeat of the difficulties and the adversities and the challenges that we face in this world, it lifts us all of that and puts our mind on a higher plane. And so this is a Psalm of worship, I've titled the message, "An Anthem of Praise." Everything about this song, everything about this Psalm is designed to lead us to fulfill its call to praise the Lord.

Now that leads us to a simple question, I guess, a simple definition that I want to address is that if we are praising the Lord, we're being called to worship and what is worship? Well, we worship God when we ascribe supreme worth to him, when we ascribe to God, when we verbally recognize his attributes, when we recognize his excellence, when we recognize his position to us as our God, we ascribe worth to him, we acknowledge him, and we bend our heart and we lift our voices up to acknowledge the greatness of his being. And as a church, both as a local church and the people of God more broadly, we need to repeatedly lay the groundwork for true worship because, and I don't feel like being polemical tonight, the mere fact that in some places can generate emotion is not the same thing as worship, as ascribing worth to God. If, you know, you can manipulate people's emotions with lights and music and things like that and generate certain feelings

and sensations inside them, but if that's done apart from a vertical focus that's designed to ascribe worth to God and majesty to his name, then we haven't worshiped at all. And James Montgomery Boice says this, he says, "A disaster such as the one that has overtaken the Evangelical church in regard to its worship is not going to be cured overnight but we ought to make a beginning, and one way to begin is by studying what the Psalms teach about worship."

So we realize that the worship in the Evangelical church has been compromised by a man-centered approach to ministry, but one of the things that we do, what we do and, you know, we can't change what other people do in other places, but what we can do is to understand what Scripture says about worship and follow the pattern that is laid down for us so that we ourselves could offer acceptable worship to God no matter what anyone else is doing, and so this is an invitation to us, it's a call to us. And if you think about it this way, beloved, the Lord has called us out of the world, the Lord has called us away from worldly things and worldly thinking, and so our focus and the way that we respond to him can't be a worldly kind of response, it needs to be something which the Lord himself has given to us and revealed to us. God requires from us worship in the way that he has commanded. We are not free to just make up our own patterns of worship, we need to worship God in spirit and in truth, to worship him according to biblical principles, and as we do that we can know that our worship is that which is pleasing and acceptable in his sight, and that's far more important to us than anything that is happening in the world around us.

So we want to walk through this Psalm rather briefly tonight, obviously with a Psalm of this length we can't go into detail in any particular verse, we just want to get the broad sweep of it, but let's look, first of all, at the first two verses with what we could call this: the initial call to praise. The initial call to praise. Psalm 135 opens with a call to worship. I've already read it before but let's do it again as we kind of go through the text sequentially now, where it says, "Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; Praise Him, O servants of the LORD, You who stand in the house of the LORD, In the courts of the house of our God!" And so the psalmist is addressing the call to praise to those who are responsible, or were responsible in the day, to lead the worship, the priests and the Levites who were serving in the temple. That's the significance of the "servants of the LORD" and "You who stand in the house of the LORD." But as we peek ahead to the end of the Psalm, we see that it's broader than just those that were specifically tasked with the leadership and worship. Look at the last three verses where we see this, where it says, "O house of Israel, bless the LORD; O house of Aaron, bless the LORD; O house of Levi, bless the LORD," and then he expands it out to all of the true people of God when he says, "You who revere the LORD, bless the LORD." And so this is a universal call to praise that is being made to the people of God. It addresses those who lead in worship so that they would rise to the occasion of their responsibilities, but we see by what the psalmist has said here is that the people are ready to respond. So there is a particular responsibility for those in leadership to come prepared to lead in worship but the people of God have the opportunity and have the responsibility to themselves come, to prepare their own hearts for worship, and to be ready to join in and to not simply depend on what the leadership is doing but to prepare their own hearts out of their own love, their own

devotion, their own desire to praise the Lord and to give thanks to him for the greatness of his works in your own life. And so we all come together under the resounding call to praise that Psalm 135 gives to us.

Now for the longest time when I was a new believer, I didn't have a real clear idea of what my private worship was supposed to be like and what are you supposed to say when you praise the Lord. You know, you go to prayer and you say, "Well, Lord, I praise You. Yup, I really praise You and I bless Your name." And I didn't know what was supposed to come next and so you're just left kind of saying some phrases at the start without there being a substance behind it, without it being an informed matter of worship, and what we find as we go through the Psalms and in this one in particular, what we do as we praise the Lord whether it's corporately or in our private, you know, in our private times of prayer, is to understand our second point out of this Psalm: the reasons for praise. The reasons for praise. And if you just think about it in kind of a biblical logical way, you could just say, "Okay, Lord, I praise You," why am I doing that? For what reasons? Upon what grounds do I ascribe praise and worth to the Lord to who I am praying? And what you see in Psalm 135 and in others as well, you see in Psalm 135 the psalmist laying out and detailing the reasons for his praise, why it is that he is praising him, and as you go through the reasons, as you meditate on these things, as you recite them and rehearse them before the Lord and your own heart is moved by the truth that you are responding to, then your praise becomes more fitting, it becomes more well-rounded, it becomes that which is a conscious engagement with the character of God to give him the worship that he desires.

So the psalmists always give us reasons to lift our voices in praise. We worship the Lord because, we worship the Lord for this reason, it is because the Lord is worthy of that, he is worthy of praise, and what we do in our worship, what a corporate worship service should do in one way or another, the way that you should prepare your heart as you approach the Lord in prayer is to prepare your heart by doing this: we call to mind those things of which the Lord is worthy and we give thanks to him in response to that. And so we have to think before we pray. We should not just rush into the presence of God and start babbling whatever the first things are that come to our mind, to pray and to worship God and to approach the eternal God should be done in reverence. It's an act that should be done with forethought and with earnestness brought to bear on it, and you can think about it this way, this is a very weak analogy but it's one that comes to mind. Think about it this way. In recent years, more since Nancy and I got engaged, I've just witnessed as engagement proposals become more and more elaborate and the man plans things out, he may have a photographer, a videographer there to record the moment, sometimes, you know, he's gone to lengths, he's involved other people and there's an elaborate plan in place in order to be able to pop the question to the woman that he loves and that he wants to marry; sometimes, you know, there's an entire arena of people that are involved with the moment. Well, think about it this way, beloved, if for a human relationship people can go to such great lengths and such planning and forethought ahead for what they want to say to the person that they love, surely there is a place for us to think and to approach God with a sense of what we want to say, and to engage our minds in a way that is

worthy of him rather than simply barging into his presence and say, "Give me this. I need that. Help me here. Help me there. Help them there," and so forth.

Look over at Matthew 6 and you'll see this same principle in mind as well. As Jesus teaches us about prayer in Matthew 6, we have to recall who it is that we're praying to. We need to think about what we are doing so that Jesus says in Matthew 6:9, "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven,' our Father who is in heaven, that is a majestic statement of theology addressing God as our heavenly Father and therefore one who loves us and one that we can approach in a spirit of trust, and at the same time this God who is in heaven implying his sovereignty, the one who reigns over all. You know, and I'm not saying you have to spend hours planning things out as to what you're going to say but just to refresh your mind about who it is that you're speaking to and let that influence the spirit and the tone and the subject matter of what is to be said. There is a place for us, a very important place for us to set aside for a moment, set aside for, you know, for a time as we're approaching God and just say, "Lord, let me set aside all of my human problems here, let me set aside the challenges of this day and let me just, I just want to stop and recognize You again afresh this morning. You are a good God. You are my heavenly Father. You are the Father of my Lord Jesus Christ and Christ loved me, came from heaven to earth to seek and to save sinners and, Lord, You included me in your glorious plan of salvation. I thank You for that because I know I'm not worthy of it. How great Your love must be for me for Christ to have come to redeem me like that. And Lord, I thank You that while the world seems to be spinning out of control and relationships are difficult for me, Your love is constant, You're sovereignly working in my life, You're sovereignly directing the circumstances and I trust You for that, Father. Father, I trust You that You're causing all things to work together for good in these situations. Father, I believe that You are working all things after the counsel of Your own will." And so you bring biblical matters to mind, you bring scriptural principles to mind and you honor God and you show forth that you have, you know, you bring to him a worship and a praise that is thoughtful, that is based on the meditations of the true things found in his word. And this is when our praise, this is when our prayer becomes enriched not by mechanically going through a prayer list, not by artificially trying to work up emotion or anything like that, but simply calling to mind, remembering the things that we know to be true about God and worshiping him in response to his own truth.

This is what the psalmist is teaching us to do as we go back to Psalm 135 now, and notice this as we walk through this as he says for the fourth time in verse 3, he says, "Praise the LORD," and then here's the keyword that summarizes everything that we've just been saying, "Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good," praise the LORD for this reason, because the LORD is good, on the grounds of his goodness. You see, he's saying "Praise the LORD" and then he informs the call to praise with the reasons by which we should respond to God by ascribing worth and glory to his name. And so the reasons for praise start here, first of all, with the fact that the Lord is good. The Lord is good. The psalmist, and that's kind of a subpoint of point number 2 here, the reasons for praise, point number 2, subpoint A, the Lord is good. The psalmist starts his praise by acknowledging the goodness of the Lord when he says, "the LORD is good," verse 3, "Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely."

Now we could go a lot of different directions with this but if you just remember back in Genesis 1, God's work in creation is called good, the Lord saw what he did and it was good, it was good, and Genesis 1:31 says the Lord looked at it and it was all very very good; creation itself reveals the goodness of God. Well, for us in the New Testament age, we see his goodness manifested even with a more particular focus in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, as we remember the glory of Christ and there's so many different ways that you can go with this, and let me just recommend a book in passing here, there is a Banner of Truth paperback by John Owen called "The Glory of Christ." It is a magnificent book and I recommend and I command that to you, and he shows how we grow in our sanctification and we grow and we are conformed to the image of Christ as we focus on Christ, as we remember who he is and what he has done. So we see that the Lord is good in part by remembering his Incarnation in a Philippians 2 kind of way. We focus on Christ and we remember him as we reflect on the very nature of his person. He is fully God and fully man in one person, that he is a co-equal member of the Triune Godhead, and all of these things speak to his glory and his majesty and his goodness, and so as we here in the New Testament age say, "Praise the LORD for the LORD is good," our mind should be going quickly to Christ, our mind should be going quickly to the cross and the redemptive work that Christ did for us when he bore our sins on Calvary, and his obedient life, and representing us in all of his life and in all of his death and in all of the fullness of his resurrection, we see the fullness of the goodness of God revealed in the glory of Jesus Christ. And so as we're praising God, as we go into prayer and we honor God, Christ is at the center of it for us as a New Testament believer.

Now as we go back to Psalm 135, we see the psalmist, the man of Israel writing, he looks back and he looks back and he sees the way that God had blessed the nation of Israel. And so having made the general statement about the Lord's goodness, he goes on in verse 4 and draws out more detail about what he means and what he has in mind as he contemplates the goodness of the Lord. So he says in verse 4, "For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession." And so as a member of the nation of Israel, the psalmist is remembering God's electing love on the nation of Israel.

If you'll look back at Deuteronomy 7, you'll see the spirit of what lies behind that statement of the Lord's goodness in choosing Israel. Verse 4 says, "the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself." Now the richness of that is found in Deuteronomy 7:6 and what it means that the Lord chose them and why the Lord chose Israel. In Deuteronomy 7:6 we see this, Moses tells the people, "you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments." And so here we see God declaring why it was that he chose Israel and it

is a statement of his unique love upon a small and insignificant people. God chose them that they might be his own possession. In other words, great privilege was bestowed upon Israel in God choosing them and it wasn't for any merit on their part. It wasn't because they were so big and mighty, they were the fewest of all of the peoples, the text says, but God determined to set his love on this people that they would be his people and he would be their God so that he could manifest his faithfulness and loyal love to them throughout all generations.

Well now, then for the call to praise God, this explains to us why God, why the people of God should respond in praise and worship to him. It is a lovely thing about the character of God that this is the way that he does it. The New Testament says that he doesn't choose many mighty, many noble, that, you know, he chooses for his own common people like you and me and brings us to himself. When there was nothing deserving, there was nothing meritorious, there was nothing special about you and me, God chose us out of the goodness of his own heart being displayed to us. You know, and you think about where some of us came from and, you know, the checkered pasts that some of us have, or the, you know, the obscure families that God chose us out of, and yet here we are the children of God destined to see the face of Christ at the throne of God. Why? Why would God do that? Well, there is no explanation for that except that it is found in his own goodness and love which he freely chose to set upon you if you belong to Christ. Don't you see, then, the whole point of this is to recognize that and then say, "Ah, God, I honor You. I praise You. I give thanks to You. Your love and goodness and wisdom and Your kindness in saving me from where I came from, saving me from my own sin and rebellion against You, You are a good God and I praise You. I praise You because You are good and Your goodness is seen in the fact that You chose me for salvation before the beginning of time."

So these are very lofty thoughts that are being expressed here. We cannot back away from the doctrine of election. We cannot back away from God's sovereign choice of his people. It's clearly taught in Scripture and it's in God's electing love that we find our highest security. He loved me. He chose me. He redeemed me. He adopted me into his family all at his sovereign prerogative, his sovereign initiative. Because he just chose to set his love on me, we as the people of God, we respond to that and say, "Lord, we're so unworthy of that. We're unworthy, You're worthy of our praise and we give it to You because You are good, and we know that You are good because You have chosen us to be Your people." All that God does is good because all that he is is good, and so we praise him because the Lord is good.

Now as you continue on in Psalm 135, what you find is that he expands the theme more broadly and it's not just that the Lord is good but also that the Lord is great. The Lord is great. Remember, this whole Psalm is about praising the Lord and why we praise the Lord, and calling us to honor God and give him his due. Well, in verse 5 he goes on and he describes the transcendence of God, the highness of God, you might say. Verse 5, "For I know that the LORD is great And that our Lord is above all gods." And so the psalmist here is expressing the fact that the God of Israel is the true and living God. He's the real God. There are no others. He is distinct from the false dead gods of all the other nations

that were around at the time, and that are around in our day as well. God, listen, God is great and we need to contemplate these things. In his greatness, God is separate from everything else. His essence, who he is, is completely distinct, completely different from everything else in the universe. God is a Triune God. God is uncreated. He had no beginning. He will have no end. He sovereignly does whatever he pleases to do. No one in the universe is like that. No one else is omnipresent. No one else is omniscient. No one else is omnipotent like the God of the Bible is. He is great. He is great and as a result of that, you know, to follow and stay in the flow of the thought of the Psalm, it's because he is so great, beloved, that we praise him. We praise him for his goodness and we, as it were, we dig and drill a well deep into his goodness and we find all kinds of abundant fresh water to praise him for his goodness and his love; we drill a separate well down into the greatness of God and our praise takes on a whole different dimension, a prayer of awe, a prayer of majesty, a prayer of reverence and fear, in response to his love, a praise of assurance and closeness and intimacy, in his greatness one that recognizes his exaltation and he is utterly distinct from who you and I are. And so we're praising him in multiple multiple directions and as a result of his greatness, he deserves praise because of his sovereign majesty as the King of the universe.

Look at verse 6 with me. Psalm 135:6, "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." God's greatness is displayed in creation and his power over it. It reminds us of Psalm 115:3, you don't need to turn there. Psalm 115:3 recognizing the sovereign majesty of God, it says in Psalm 115:3, "But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." And so we acknowledge him and we praise him because of his sovereign majesty and his greatness is displayed in creation.

Look at verse 7 where it says in Psalm 135, "He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain, Who brings forth the wind from His treasures." The whole world spins by the wisdom and pleasure of God. He is the Creator and providential sustainer of everything that we see about us. And so the psalmist has gone from the general to the specific. He's great in the heavens, he does whatever he pleases, and then he gets specific and shows exactly how it is that God does whatever he pleases. The God of the Bible, he established the cycle of rain, evaporation and condensation. He rides on the lightning bolt and the rushing wind to guide and send them to their appointed destinations. And his greatness is further displayed as we keep reading in his role as the Savior of Israel.

Look at verses 8 and 9 with me as he looks back to the history just prior to the exodus when the people of God were enslaved in Egypt. He says in verse 8, "He smote the firstborn of Egypt, Both of man and beast. He sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt, Upon Pharaoh and all his servants." And so the psalmist here is pointing back to the nation's deliverance from slavery in Egypt which had occurred sometime prior to the writing of this Psalm, and you'll remember that the climax of the series of 10 plagues that God imposed upon Egypt to deliver his people, the climax, the last one of that was that he slew the firstborn of every family, he slew the firstborn of animals as the great climax of the plagues that he sent upon Pharaoh to display his power. And so he uses that final plague as a summary for the fullness of what God did in miraculously delivering his

people by the hand of Moses. Here's how we're supposed to process that in our minds in the context of this call to praise the Lord. As you reflect on that, as you remember that and meditate on it, you ask yourself this question: what God is able to do that? What God can do that? What God acts to save his people like that? And you recognize the greatness of the power that was displayed when the children of Israel were delivered from slavery under the hand of the mightiest nation on earth at the time, you remember that power and it causes you to praise him. "God, I ascribe worth to You. I praise You, hallelujah, as I remember the greatness of Your power with which You delivered Your people."

And so in this section of the Psalm, he's gone from God's power in creation to his power in the national salvation of Israel, and all of that informing the call to praise and making the call to praise irresistible to the people of God. "Yes, I do remember that," and the truth of all of that stirs the heart to want to ascribe glory and honor to God in the same way that when we talk about Christ together as New Testament believers and we remember the majesty of Christ, we remember the miracles that he performed, we remember the mighty words and the glorious teaching, we remember him on the cross praying for those who crucified him, we remember him buried, we remember him raised from the dead, ascended in glory to heaven, and we say, "What God is like that? What God is like our Christ?" And our hearts come with either with a humble reverence or with an enthusiastic response of glory to his name, but in one way or another the presence of Christ brings us to an attitude of awe, an attitude as we'll see on Sunday of fear, of adoration. And the truth of who Christ is stimulates us to give honor to his name, and the true people of God are glad to do that. That's why we live, we live to honor him, we want to do that. It's the person who has no desire and these things don't resonate in their heart, someone could be here, I can picture someone being here and saying, "That doesn't resonate with me. I don't care about this. How soon are you going to be done?" And whatever else you say about that, it's a deadness to these things that is the mark of someone who doesn't have the life of God in them. For those of us that are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, our hearts, our minds, our wills respond to this, wanting to ascribe glory to the one that we know is the Savior of our souls.

So God delivered his people from Egypt. The psalmist goes on and recites more history in verses 10 through 12. Look at those with me. Speaking of God he says, "He smote many nations And slew mighty kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites, And Og, king of Bashan, And all the kingdoms of Canaan; And He gave their land as a heritage, A heritage to Israel His people." So these are references to kings that God defeated in the wilderness as the people of Israel marched through and as God gave them victory over their enemies; those military victories were displaying the greatness of God. And he led his people through the wilderness for those 40 years, he led them on to conquest after they crossed the Jordan and entered into the Promised Land. God doing this, God in real time, in real history, in real acts in time and space did this for his people. These are matters of historical reality and it displays his goodness to his people, it displays his sovereign power over the mightiest men on earth, and the conclusion that we draw from that is that his sovereignty means that he will reign forever. He will never be overthrown. He will never be displaced from his office as the King of the universe.

Look at verse 13 where it says, "Your name, O LORD, is everlasting, Your remembrance, O LORD, throughout all generations. For the LORD will judge His people And will have compassion on His servants." And the name of God here is a shorthand for his reputation. Who God is, the psalmist is saying, will never be forgotten. There are those philosophers that have tried to declare that God was dead, there are men today that deny the existence of God despite the testimony that abides in their own conscience, in their own heart, but God will never be erased. You and I, we could all go away tomorrow and if we did our names would be quickly forgotten and our names eventually, beloved, will be quickly forgotten over the course of time, but God's name, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that will never be forgotten. His name will always be remembered among his people because God will guarantee that it does.

And listen, there's a very practical matter about this and our understanding of this fuels our philosophy of ministry and the way that we try to do things here at the church, and the way that we should think about God's purposes in the broader church over the course of time. There are popular writers, popular pollsters who periodically will say the church needs to change and adapt to what the audience wants or else it's going to become irrelevant, it will cease to exist because people don't want the way that it has always been done, people don't want biblical truth and so you need to give them what they want if the church is going to continue on. Beloved, that is foolish. That is wrong. That is impossible. Jesus Christ said, "I will build My church." God will accomplish his purposes and it may seem from human perception that the church is waning, that the church is at low tide from time to time, but God himself will make sure that his name is never utterly forgotten. God will raise up a Luther. God will raise up an Augustine. God will raise up a Lloyd-Jones. God will raise up a Spurgeon to stand against the downgrade and stand against the errors that threaten the very viability of the future of the gospel. God will raise up his own to make sure his name is never forgotten.

So we don't have to adapt to the desires of the world in order to gain the approval of the world and to keep the people of the world within the walls of the church. We don't have to do that. That's not why we exist as the people of God. We exist, we exist to praise God on his terms and that's why the Psalm says, "Praise the LORD!" The focus of our praise, the focus of our attention is who the Lord is and what he has done, and what he will do, and what he has promised. That is our focus. That's what we ascribe worth to and if people want to come along and join in the chorus of the voice, we welcome them. But if people turn away, we don't change what we're doing because the biblical call to praise the Lord stands based on the fact that the Lord is good and the Lord is great, and that's why we exist. It doesn't matter what the world tells us we should do, we respond to what God has told us to do. God says, "This is the reason you exist, you exist to give praise to Me." And there's serving others that fall under that umbrella but the focal point of it all is that we exist to praise the Lord.

So you would think that the psalmist had said enough but he keeps on going, and now in verses 15 through 17 he draws a contrast to further explicate, to further expound on why we should praise the Lord and he draws a contrast with false gods so that he says there in verse 15, look at it with me, it says, "The idols of the nations are but silver and gold, The

work of man's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; They have eyes, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear, Nor is there any breath at all in their mouths." The psalmist here is making a mockery of the so-called gods of the other nations. They would make statues that had a semblance of human traits, they would make gods after their own image that somehow looked a little bit like them with eyes and ears and so forth, but their stone idols had no power at all to use the attributes that were given to them. Their eyes were blind. Their ears were deaf. Their noses could not smell, you know? Their mouths cannot speak. They were dead and lifeless. There was nothing to them. They were mere rocks or mere wood. There was nothing else to them. And what the psalmist is saying by contrast is our God is not like that. Our God made eyes and so therefore he sees. Our God made ears and so therefore he hears. Our God made mouths and therefore he speaks. He is alive. He actually reigns over nature and nations. That's who our God is. He is good. He is great. He is the living God in contrast to all the other idols of the nations.

These idols are powerless, they are inept, they are foolish and the psalmist issues a warning to those that are engaged in idol worship, he says in verse 18, "Those who make them will be like them, Yes, everyone who trusts in them." You become powerless and empty when you follow a false god, and in this context the nations who followed gods that were not God, they were no threat to the people of God, not ultimately. They could never triumph over against Israel and the living God except by the permission in the sending of God to discipline his people.

So the Psalm opened with a call to praise, in the section that we've just reviewed we've seen the reasons for praise, the Lord is good, the Lord is great, the Lord is not like the idols of the nations, and now he comes full circle at the end of the Psalm and, point number 3, he gives a renewed call to praise. He opened, picture the top of the circle, opened with a call to praise, he comes around and gives all the reasons to praise, and now he ends up where he began at verse 19 with a broad call to worship and to give thanks. It says in verse 19, "O house of Israel, bless the LORD; O house of Aaron, bless the LORD; O house of Levi, bless the LORD; You who revere the LORD, bless the LORD. Blessed be the LORD from Zion, Who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!"

Now just in keeping with seeing the interconnection of the Psalms across the psalter, this call to Israel, this call to Aaron, this call to Levi, it echoes past Psalms that we have seen. Look quickly at Psalm 115:9. Before we even got into the Songs of Ascent, in Psalm 115 you see this in verse 9, Psalm 115:9, "O Israel, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield. You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD; He is their help and their shield." And then over in Psalm 118:2 you see these same groups being called out, "Oh let Israel say, 'His lovingkindness is everlasting.' Oh let the house of Aaron say, 'His lovingkindness is everlasting.' Oh let those who fear the LORD say, 'His lovingkindness is everlasting.'" He's calling out the praise of the people of God, "Remember who your God is and verbalize the fact that His loyal love is eternal, that He is a God who is always faithful to His people. He will never abandon those that He has brought into covenant relationship with Himself." And these groupings that we see in Psalm 115, Psalm 118, Psalm 135,

these groupings express the totality of all of God's people so that as we gather together here tonight in the year 2022, some 2,500-3,000 years after this Psalm was written, the call that was written millennia ago still applies to us. O people of God, O brother and sister in Christ, remember your God, remember your Christ and praise the Lord.

Let's pray together.

Father, on this side of the cross we see Your power and goodness with even greater clarity. Oh, You loved Israel, You were great and You were good to them but, Father, the fullness of the revelation has been saved for us to see; in the gospel, in the Lord Jesus Christ we now have things that the prophets strained to see and was not given to them, that angels bent over from heaven to see and it was not given to them, but it's been given to us. We see the Lord Jesus Christ. We know Him as our Lord, as our Savior. We know Him as the One who personally has conquered sin and death and hell, and this Christ is alive forevermore. O Christ, O Father, O Spirit of God, yes, we respond to the call. We praise You Father, Son and Holy Spirit with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, with all of our strength, with all of our mind. You have delighted to save us and how wonderful to think that You delight in our praise. We gladly respond to the call, O Lord. Together corporately, individually in our hearts, O God, we say praise the Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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