

# Praise God for His Great Works

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**Scripture Readings:** Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-21 • **Text:** Psalm 111

Beloved people of God, do you like singing songs of praises to God? Many of the songs in our hymnbooks are songs of praise. We usually begin our worship with songs of praises to the God we worship. And God has given us an inspired songbook, the Book of Psalms.

Contemporary praise songs are very different from the Psalter. They usually only have the verses that contain praises to God which are sung over and over again. A good example of this is the song “Majesty, Worship His Majesty”:

*Majesty, worship His majesty.  
Unto Jesus be all glory, honor, and praise.  
Majesty, kingdom authority  
flow from His throne, unto His own;  
His anthem raise.*

But the Psalms are not like the unending, repetitious, trite praise songs that we hear today. The praise psalms usually begin with exuberant praise of the Lord, just like most praise songs today. The psalmist is exuberant because he is aware of God’s presence when he praises God in song. But praise psalms don’t end in repetitious stanzas of praise, adoration, and exaltation. The stanzas that follow the praise expand on the *reasons* why God is praised. God is not praised, just because he is majestic and glorious (no one has seen God, except for his majestic and glorious creation). But rather, he is praised because he has done something in the life of the individual or the church.

A good example of this is in the Exodus story. After the Israelites escape from Egypt, and after the army of the Pharaoh drowned in the sea, Moses and the people sang a song of praise to the Lord, saying, “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea” (Exod. 15:1).

Our text is also a good example of a praise psalm. It begins with a call for praise, “Praise the Lord!” and ends with a praise, “His praise endures forever.” But in the middle of the psalm are all the reasons why the psalmist praises the Lord. Praise the Lord

- (1) For His Gracious Covenant;
- (2) For His Unchanging Commandments
- (3) For His Righteous Redeemer

## **For His Gracious Covenant**

When the psalms mention the “great, wonderful, marvelous works” of the Lord, they usually refer to either his works in creation, or his work in delivering Israel from Egypt and establishing them as his covenant people (vv. 5-9). But the context of Psalm 111 is not God mighty acts in creation, but his great deeds in redeeming Israel from Egypt. When God commissioned Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, he told Moses, “I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it” (Exod. 3:20). After they were delivered from Egypt, they sang, “Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Exod. 15:11). And the psalmist addresses God, “You are the God who works wonders” (Psa. 77:14). Because God is glorious and majestic, his work is also described as glorious and majestic.

What does the psalmist want us to do with God’s mighty acts in history? He says that they are worthy to be studied with care, to be meditated upon, and to be pondered. His works are a memorial for us to remember him. The Passover feast is a memorial to be kept throughout the generations of Israel. During this feast, when the children ask them, “What do you mean by this service?” the parents will recount how the Destroyer passed over the houses of Israelites, but struck the Egyptians (Exod. 12:14; 26-27). They are to remember God’s grace and mercy in leading Israel into the promised land, even after they worshipped the golden calf (Exod. 34:6; Psa. 103:8). They are to cherish the manna and the quails that God sent to them when they were hungry in the wilderness, and the water that gushed from the dry rock when they were thirsty in the desert (Psa. 78:23-24). God always remembers his covenant with his people (Psa. 105:8) in doing his wonderful, marvelous works. And by these mighty acts, he has shown his power.

In the same way, our knowledge of God’s mighty acts enable us to be grateful to him, and to the Old Testament and New Testament saints who have gone before us. They labored faithfully unto death to preach the gospel and build the church of Christ. They gave us the inspired word of God, the songs we sing and the prayers we pray in our worship. They defended the church against many heresies all throughout its history. This means that our worship service is also a memorial to the wonderful works that God has done all throughout the history of his chosen people.

People of God, do you delight in studying and pondering about the works that God has done in your life, and in the life of this church? How the Holy Spirit has transformed your life

from unbelief, rebellion, and worldliness into a life of faith, obedience, and godliness? In times of plenty, are you blessed in praising God for all his physical and material provisions for you and your loved ones? And in times of pain and suffering, are you encouraged by thanking God for his promise that he works all things for the good of those who love him, and think of the glory that awaits us?

### **For His Unchanging Commandments**

Secondly, we praise God for his unchanging, eternal commandments.

The Psalms frequently refer to God's word in different ways: "precepts," "law," "commandments," "statutes," or "testimonies." All these words are synonymous to God's commandments. We can see this in the longest psalm of all, Psalm 119, where the word of God is referred to in all these different ways (read Psa. 119:97-100).

In verses 7-8, the psalmist uses many synonymous words to describe God's precepts. Verse 7 says that his precepts are established, trustworthy (ESV, NIV, RSV), and sure (KJV, NASB). Verse 8 says his precepts are "supported by," "upheld by," or "resting upon" their eternal nature – they are supported forever and ever. God's precepts are faithful and upright, and God's people are called to obey them in faithfulness and uprightness. All of these descriptions can be summarized into three attributes or qualities of God's commandments: they are *eternal, truthful, and righteous*. These are also descriptions of the character of God himself. He himself is eternal, truthful, and righteous.

God's word is *eternal*. His word is firm and established. It is unchanging and sure. Because from eternity, he has ordained everything that will come to pass, whatever things he says are fulfilled. This is why the psalmist says that his commandments are established forever and ever. The prophet Isaiah confirmed this when he said, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (40:8). Jesus also said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). And since God knows everything, he doesn't change his mind. This means that the unchanging word of God is dependable and trustworthy. We can be assured that whatever he says in his word will never change because his word is true and everlasting.

God's statutes are *truthful*. Jesus himself affirmed this while praying to the Father, "Your word is truth." God's word does not err, or make a mistake. Many pastors and theologians today lead the church astray when they teach that the Bible has many contradictions. Some others say that even if they do not believe that all of God's word is true, we can still use

portions of the Bible that are true. It has good things to tell us how we should live, like a manual for daily living, but we can leave out those portions that are not relevant to us today – the Old Testament, the miracles, and things that don't apply to our time and culture. But 2 Timothy 3:16 says that “*all* Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”

Third and last, the precepts of God are *righteous*, because God himself is righteous. They are always just, because he is not capable of doing anything evil. Psalm 89:14 says of God, “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne.” God is not capricious, whimsical, or arbitrary in his ways. This means that he is not like Greek gods and goddesses whose actions are motivated not by justice and righteousness, but by a sudden impulse or a spur of the moment decision. They're not interested that justice and righteousness be done, but only to promote their own selfish ambitions. Not so with God. His actions are always for the good of his people, his own, treasured possession. His commands are established so that his people may also live in justice and righteousness.

This means that we cannot accuse God of being “unfair” or “unjust.” Many people criticize the Reformed or Calvinist view of salvation as unfair or unjust. They say that God cannot unfairly choose only some people to be saved. If he is a loving God, how can he not choose my wife, my child, or my friend? In anticipation of the same reaction from Christians 2,000 years ago, Paul asks them this very same question as he explained God's righteous electing action: “What shall we say, then? Is there injustice on God's part?” and his answer was an emphatic “By no means!” (Rom. 9:14). This also means that we cannot accuse God of unfairly causing evil and suffering in this world. Because whatever evil and suffering people go through is the result of human sin. But God allows these things to happen for his own glory and for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28).

### **For His Righteous Redeemer**

Finally, we also praise him for sending his righteous Redeemer.

In verse 9, the psalmist says that God sent his redemption to his people. In the Old Testament, the word for “redemption” usually refers to Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Deut. 7:8; Psa. 106:10). After God delivered them out of Egypt, he made a covenant with them at Sinai, and there, before the smoke, fire, earthquake, cloud, and a loud voice, the Israelites trembled before God. God showed to the people that he is a God “to be revered and feared” because his name is holy. In verse 10, the psalmist says that the reverence of God is the

foundation of having wisdom – wisdom that comes from God, and not the wisdom that the world gives. Godly wisdom is given only to those who remember and keep God’s gracious covenant and unchanging word. Those who reverence God’s holy name will reflect God’s holy qualities of trustworthiness, truthfulness, and righteousness.

But you may be thinking, since man is sinful and not holy, who will truly remember and keep God’s covenant and word? Who is truly holy, trustworthy, truthful, and righteous among God’s people? No one.

Here, the connection to Psalm 112 is important. Psalms 111 and 112 are “matching” psalms. Both are introduced with “Praise the Lord,” and both are acrostic poems, with each of the 22 lines beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 111 is an acrostic poem about the mighty deeds, the glory, the righteousness of God, while Psalm 112 is an acrostic poem about the righteousness, the goodness, and the blessedness of the righteous man. The transition between the two poems is provided by the last verse of Psalm 111, where the writer affirms that the righteous one who fears the Lord will have wisdom and good understanding. Thus, the two psalms tell us that the righteous one images the character of God in his life.

Who is the truly holy, trustworthy, truthful, and righteous one? Only the God-Man Christ Jesus our Lord. His whole life was lived in holiness, truthfulness and righteousness, so he would be worthy to merit salvation for us. All of his life he fulfilled the covenant of works that Adam was not able to keep.

His life was like a second Exodus. God sent redemption to his people by sending his son to be our Passover Lamb sacrifice. On the cross, he sprinkled us with his blood so that God would “pass over” our guilt and sin. He leads his people safely from slavery to sin and the curse of death, through the waters of death, and finally, to the promised heavenly city. He is the bread of heaven and the water of life who satisfies his people when they hunger and thirst for righteousness. Christ is also our wisdom, because in him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3).

Just as Moses was the mediator of the old covenant at Sinai, so is Christ the mediator of the new covenant of grace in his blood. In this new covenant of grace, we come to God by faith in Christ. We are redeemed from our bondage to sin and guilt, and forgiven of our rebellion by putting our faith in Christ, and not on our own good works. We are clothed with his righteousness to cover the filthy sinfulness that we are wearing.

## Conclusion

Beloved people of God, we worship God together in the congregation of the upright, not because of what we have done in our lives, but because of what Christ has done in his life of obedience.

We give him all the praise for the wonderful, marvelous works that he has done for us. We exalt his name because he remembers the gracious covenant that he made with our forefathers in the faith. We offer gratitude to him because he revealed his perfect will to us through his unchanging, eternal commandments. And we praise and thank him for sending his own son Jesus Christ to redeem us from the bondage of sin and death.

But our offerings of praise and thanksgiving in our prayers and songs are acceptable in God's sight only if our lives are lived in the fear and reverence of God. Because the sacrifice that is pleasing to God is a broken and contrite heart and a life that mirrors the holiness, truthfulness, and righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom be glory, honor, power, and praise. Praise the Lord!

### *Psalm 111 (from the 1650 Scottish Psalter)*

Tunes: Azmom, Martyrdom, Saint Agnes

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| 1 <i>Praise ye the Lord: with my whole heart<br/>I will God's praise declare,<br/>Where the assemblies of the just<br/>and congregations are.</i>       | 6 <i>He did the power of his works<br/>unto his people show,<br/>When he the heathen's heritage<br/>upon them did bestow.</i>                   |
| 2 <i>The whole works of the Lord our God<br/>are great above all measure,<br/>Sought out they are of ev'ry one<br/>that doth therein take pleasure.</i> | 7 <i>His handy-works are truth and right;<br/>all his commands are sure:</i>  |
| 3 <i>His work most honourable is,<br/>most glorious and pure,<br/>And his untainted righteousness<br/>for ever doth endure.</i>                         | 8 <i>And, done in truth and uprightness,<br/>they evermore endure.</i>  |
| 4 <i>His works most wonderful he hath<br/>made to be thought upon:<br/>The Lord is gracious, and he is<br/>full of compassion.</i>                      | 9 <i>He sent redemption to his folk;<br/>his covenant for aye<br/>He did command: holy his name<br/>and rev'rend is alway.</i>                  |
| 5 <i>He giveth meat unto all those<br/>that truly do him fear;<br/>And evermore his covenant<br/>he in his mind will bear.</i>                          | 10 <i>Wisdom's beginning is God's fear:<br/>good understanding they<br/>Have all that his commands fulfill:<br/>his praise endures for aye.</i> |