

What it Means to Praise

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Date: 02 January 2022

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[0 : 0 0] We're continuing a series today that we were doing before Christmas time called Songs for Life and in that we're looking at different Psalms over the course of 10 weeks or so.

And the idea in this series is it's not that we have 150 disconnected Psalms within the one book, but that actually because the Bible writers love design and because God loves design, the Psalms are all actually connected and there's themes and there's repetition throughout, but there are a couple things that make the connection really clear throughout the book of Psalms. And that's that you'll have noticed before probably and we've mentioned in the series that there are five different books in the Psalms within the one book. And one of the deepest connections between those five books we find in this passage, which is why we chose it. And each week we're looking at a couple examples of different Psalms from the different books to show how they're all actually bound together. And at the very end of this passage there was the refrain, Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel, from everlasting everlasting and let all the people say amen. And that refrain actually shows up at the end of every single one of the first four books. So you see that same text, the quote from Psalm 41, 72, 89 and then 106. Those are the ends of each of the four books.

And then in the fifth book you have five straight Psalms that say the same thing over and over again. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. And that means that this morning there's 50 verses about in this passage. We've got to focus. We can't look at all of them. And so let's look at what binds the book of Psalms together. And that's the command that begins this passage and ends this passage. It's the command to worship. It's the phrase praise the Lord. And as we start 2022 and we see that as the binder across the book of Psalms, the command praise the Lord, you know, it's always a good idea to get back to basics and to ask the question, what does it mean to praise?

And so this morning we're going to do that. Let's ask three questions of this passage. What does it mean to praise? Why do we praise or why should we praise and how can we do it? And they're all right here in Psalm 1-6. So let's do that first. What does it mean to praise? And I just want to say something very brief about this. If you look at verse two, it asks the question, who can utter the mighty deeds of the Lord or declare all of his praise? Who can declare all the praise of the Lord? Now, we are very used to when we look at the Psalms hearing the command praise the Lord.

But here in verse two, it flips it and turns the command praise into a noun. So it says, who could declare all the praises of the Lord? And you see there, it's not saying praises Lord, it's saying that the praises of the Lord are something to praise God for. And that means you can hear in that that the word praise used as a noun means something like God's accomplishments, God's virtues, God's attributes. In other words, saying who could possibly list all the things that you could praise God for, all the praises of God, the things that make him worth praising.

[3 : 34] And so if you flip it back around to the verb that it normally is, the word praise has got to mean something like giving credit and adoration for great things, attributes, achievements, virtues, something like that. And that helps us to, I think, dig into a little bit more of a substantial definition, one of the famous definitions that you'll read from one commentator in particular, but all over the place of what it means to praise across the Bible. What does it mean? It means this ascribing ultimate value to something. So to praise something is to ascribe ultimate value to whatever it is that you're praising. And so the Bible has all these synonyms that capture that. The weight of that idea, we say right next to praise, we say worship, we say glory in, take glory in, we ascribe adoration, we laud, that's the old King James, we honor.

There's all sorts of synonyms for that. And in all those words, they're wrapped up in the one command in Hebrew, which everybody, Christian, or if you've not grown up in the church, you'll know it, it's hallelujah, which is a one sentence actually command, hallel, praise, hallelujah, praise God, the Lord. And in those words to glory, hallelujah, praise, bound into the weight of those words is the fact that there's a second part to the definition of what it means to praise. Praise does not only mean ascribing ultimate value to something, but it's ascribing ultimate value to something with all of who you are. So with your intellect, with your emotional life, and with your desires, your will. And you know, as we go through the Psalm in just a moment, you'll see that this passage says things that you need to know about the one you're praising. It says you've got to know something in your mind. And then of course, the Psalm is a song, it's saying you've got to sing it too, because it hits the emotions. And then of course, the whole point of the Psalm is that you, your idea about God and your will and your desires would be changed. And so praise is ascribing ultimate value to something and doing it with your mind, your will and your emotional life, all of what you are. And that means the command when you hear the command hallelujah, which we read twice at the beginning and end here, it really means something like bow your knee, get on your knees, bow your knee, knee, and bow the whole self before whatever you find most precious, before that thing that you think is most worthy of praise. All right, now that that leads us then to dig in a little more and ask, why do we why do we do this? Why are we being commanded to praise and why the human beings praise at all? And that's also right here. There's there's three reasons I think in this passage that come up for why we praise. And there's one central reason. But let's look at one of the subordinate reasons first. The first is this, we praise, we worship, because we actually have to. We have, we have to. And commentators, sociologists, Christian theologians, psychologists, pick your field of study. Everybody in the academy actually agrees that human beings are adoring and praising creatures. We cannot stop praising things. We can't stop worshiping things.

The question is never are we worshiping? It's always what is it? What is it that we're worshiping? And this Psalm, the one of the reasons we chose it is because it's exemplary, because it's a Psalm that teaches us why we have the Psalms. And you know, why do we have the Psalms? Maybe the most binding connection of all the Psalms is the command, praise the Lord, praise the Lord. It comes up so many times. Why? And it's because we as human beings have to praise something, but we struggle so much with always praising things that we're not supposed to praise. And so the Psalms are songs that exist that keep having to yell at me and you to say, praise the Lord, get back to praising what you're supposed to praise, praise the Lord. And that's actually exactly what the whole of this passage Psalm 106 is really about. Let me just show you this disparity by covering 40 verses really quickly. We're going to cover all 40 of the verses. You would have noticed when we were reading that this passage is a series of stories of the ways that Israel was saved by God, even when they didn't want to be. And then they turned around and rejected the God who saved them. And the Psalmist really is confessing that sin and saying, once more, look at us. We've done it again.

You know, we're in exile again, because once again, we've rejected the God who had saved us. And now we're asking that he would do it again. And that's what the Psalm is about. And in it, there's six, seven, eight different stories of how they did that, which are all about this grand problem that we have to worship, but we are always worshiping the wrong things. And in verse seven to 12, God had brought them out of Egypt, the Israelites, and saved them. And they saw, they saw his plugs, they saw his power, they saw him spread the Red Sea apart into two. And as soon as they got across the water, they said, I want to be back in Egypt. And we learn from that little section that human beings praise security and safety more often than they praise God, that we're prone to do that. And in verses 13 to 15, they get into the desert lands. And they say, we want to be back in Egypt again, because we would rather have food in our bellies than following the God who has saved us.

And we learn there that human beings praise their bellies and their appetites more than they praise the God that that's revealed himself. And you jump to verses 16 to 18, which is a story from Numbers chapter 16, where Korah and some others tried to lead a coup against God's appointed leadership. And we learn there that we humans are very prone to worshiping power and fame more than the God who has revealed himself. And you jump to the climax story, which is verses 19 to 23.

[10:10] And they worshipped, they bowed before a crafted idol, a cow, a calf, rather than the God who was actually making himself visible on the mountain next to them, but in cloud. And we learn there that human beings would rather praise and worship something that is visible and empirical and certain. They want to touch what they worship. And they want to, they want to be able to see it more than the God who has revealed himself. And you jump to verses 24 to 27, and they get to the edge of the promised land and they refuse to go in because they worshiped their own safety more than God. And verses 28 to 31, 40 years later, after that, they reject God altogether and worship the gods of Moab. And they do that because they want pleasure. They want all the things that the gods of Moab, the sex and the money and the power that the gods of Moab offer. And we learn that human beings want pleasures more than God. And lastly, in verse 32 to 39, it summarizes all of it and says that over hundreds of years and century after century, people that God calls have defiled themselves in all sorts of ways by worshiping safety and power and fame and pleasure and resources and treasures and marriage and money and family and whatever it may be, more than the God who has revealed himself, who's made the world and said praise the Lord. God saves human beings over and over again throughout the centuries. And the pattern is always that we turn back and we struggle with worshiping, theme, creature rather than the creator. Now, that means what this is saying is that what the Bible is saying is the reason that as humans, we can't stop worshiping and we struggle to worship the right thing is never because anybody struggles with ear religion. You know, the problem with human beings is not that we are not religious. That's never been the issue. In fact, Rodney Stark, one of the current historians of our time, really good gifted historians, wrote a book called *The Triumph of Faith* where he makes a very convincing argument that people are actually more religious in 2010 when he wrote it than in 1910. It's not that we're getting less religious. It's just that organized religion is not as popular, but we're getting more religious.

Human beings are religious from top to bottom because religion happens when we set a great hope upon something that could frame our personal identity and then our desires conform to that thing. We want that thing above everything else. That's religion. And so we as human beings cannot stop worshiping. We're worshiping creatures and the problem is so acute in fact that you might have noticed as I closed this first point that in Psalm 106:20, there's the very famous quote, they exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox. And you know where that gets quoted again.

That gets quoted again only at one other time in the Bible in Romans 123, the very famous moment where Paul says, what is wrong with humanity? We exchanged the glory of God for the glory of creatures. In other words, Paul is saying the problem in the era, the centuries of BC time, the Old Testament is the exact same as the New Testament and beyond. We always do this. We exchange the glory of God for the glory of creatures. We worship, but we worship the wrong things. We have to worship. That's why we worship. Now secondly, and this is the big point, the big reason here, the big idea in this passage, why we should praise the Lord instead of creatures is captured, I think in verse 40, 44 to 48. And if you see that in verse 44, it says, nevertheless, he looked upon their distress. And when they heard their cry and for their sake, he remembered the covenant. And what that's saying is that God, despite all the ways that we worship the wrong things, nevertheless, he remembers his promise and he comes to save anyway. And if you jump back to the very beginning of the passage, places like verse one, it says, for he is good. His, he has steadfast love. He loves according to everything he said he would do. He loves all the way. Verse two, he does mighty deeds that exhibit that love. Verse seven, brings it all together and it summarizes it. It says, God, you do great works for us because you love us and you're good and you're powerful. And that's another word. The Psalmist is saying, now that is why we pray. We praise the

Lord because he's good and because in his power, he's decided to be merciful. And so we should praise the Lord. Now, we've got to get shaken up a little bit today to hear the fact, the power, the reality behind that kind of a claim. Because if you've been in church for any time in your life, the fact that God is good and powerful and just and merciful and remembers his covenant is old hat to you and can be, can get stale. Tuesday will be one month since Heather and I moved back to Edinburgh from the States. And one of the joys of doing that is to walk around again and glory in this great city.

And for anybody that's not, that's an outsider that's trying to be an insider, you move to Edinburgh or you come from elsewhere or you come to Scotland and you make that drive as I did this week through the highlands and the snow and you remember again or you see for the first time, whoa, this is unlike anywhere I've ever been and it's glorious and beautiful and overwhelming and powerful and the castle looks like it grew up out of the rock. It's like a living organism when you walk up Johnson Terrace. And you know, there's only three cities in the world set on seven hills, Athens, Rome and Edinburgh and all three have an unmatched beauty about them. And I didn't tell them I was going to do this, but it's been a privilege this week to have my sister and her husband my brother-in-law Matthias here and Matthias has never been here. He's never been out of the States and so it's been fun to get to drive through the snowy highlands and see his face experience that reality for the first time. Now look, the Psalms do this all the time. What they do is when you walk up Johnson Terrace and you see that rock and you realize how unique it is, you say, whoa, the Lord is my rock and you drive through the National Park on the way to Inverness and you say,

[17:11] God is my refuge. I mean, look, I look to the hills and I say, where does my help come from? It comes from the maker of heaven and earth. That's exactly what the Psalms do. They walk the Psalmist walk around cities and fortresses and towers and hills and mountains and they say, God is actually like that. The Lord is my shepherd because I see shepherds all the time and I know and you can do this in Scotland unlike most other places. You can say, the Lord is my shepherd because I see what the shepherds are up to and I know what kind of care they offer. And what that means is that every time a Psalm like this says, God is good and God is a rock and God is powerful and God is merciful and God is just and you should worship him because of that. It is both true and not true at the very same time. We talk about that in Christian theology of the speaking about God analogously to our reality. We say, you know, I look at that castle and I say, man, I think about God. God is like the head, but he's not like that at all at the same at the very same time. It's both true to say it and it's not true and it's not true because when I say God is a rock like that rock, we don't know the half of it. God is so much more than that. He's so much bigger and he's so much more powerful than that rock and so unmoving. The rock is only a tiny little shadow of his incomprehensibility.

We say that we can apprehend God, but we cannot comprehend God. And there's a huge difference in those two realities. And so what we have to, you see, this is where the rubber hits the road on the question. Why do you praise? You know, we know why we praise because we can't stop praising, but why praise the Lord like this Psalm commands? And here it is. If somebody was to ask you, why do you come here every Sunday, week after week? Or why are you visiting today? Or, you know, why do you come to a worship service at all? What this Psalm is saying is that your answer to that cannot be first because I really like the music or because sometimes the sermons are not that bad or because I went to a bunch of churches and I dated them all and this one, I decided to get engaged with St. Columbus rather than the other ones. It can't be for any of those reasons. That's not the first reason, at least. What this Psalm is saying is that the reason we ought to worship the

Lord, the reason we come to worship is because God deserves it. Because God deserves it. Because he's the only being that is worthy of worship. He's only being worthy of praise. He's the only one who is both like the Castle Rock, but the Castle Rock could never comprehend how God is a rock. Never. He's the only one who deserves it. And God even knows that. Of course, He knows that.

Verse eight and nine, the question is posed, why does God save Israel over and over again? And God says, for my own glory, for my namesake. And as soon as you hear something like that, we all should immediately recognize that if a human being ever says that, that's the epitome of what's wrong with the world. That's pride, that's arrogance, that's the allure of celebrity. But why is it so wrong for me to say that and for you to say that, but so right for God? And we could do a series on that question. So all we'll say is this, that whenever we say, whenever we say that's so prideful for a person to seek fame, to seek glory, to seek praise, to seek worship, why? Well, it's precisely because there is only one who actually deserves praise and glory and worship.

And if God really is that big, that omnipotent, that powerful, that praiseworthy, that merciful, then there can only be one being in the world who deserves our praise. And that is the Lord. Now finally, to close this long point out, finally, the third reason, there's one more reason, and you know the logic so far. The logic is we have to worship because we're worshipping beings. So are we worshipping the only being who deserves worship? But I just want to press into that just a little bit more and say that the third reason here to praise the Lord is because actually all of us need an object of worship in our lives that can handle our worship. Every single one of us, if you've ever worshiped in your life like me, anything that is not God, you might have found out the hard way that nothing in this world that you worship can handle the weight of your worship, can handle it. But because what worship does, we've already said this, worship frames your identity.

[22 : 00] Jesus makes this really clear in the Gospels when he tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. You know, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lazarus, a poor man goes to heaven, but the rich man dies and goes to hell. And he tells this story to explain all sorts of things, but I just want to point out one thing. Lazarus, the poor man has a name and his name is not poor man, but the rich man, he has no name. Why? Because in his life, the rich man worshiped money and he lost his identity to it. You know, whatever you worship is what you will become like. Your identity will conform to it. And so praise is so powerful because it forms your identity. And then it transforms your ethics. You live according to the law of that thing that you seek. And then that means it conforms your desires. It's worship has immense power and we're all doing it. We're putting our time, our talent, our treasure and ourselves into whatever it is that we seek. And that's why it's so serious. You've got to have something that can handle the weight of what you, of your needs, of your worship. Now, I don't say this to pick on my parents at all, actually to pick on me as a parent. But all of us know, you know, if you grew up in a healthy household, in a household that had good parents, and I know some of you did it and some of you did. But if you didn't, if you did, I should say, you know, there comes a time in your life where you hit that age where you realize that your parents are big sinners. And hopefully, they, you know that because they said it to you over and over again. But what you realize at some point as a child, and I hope that my kids are growing to know this, is that if you put the weight of your expectations of ultimate security, righteousness, goodness and health in the power and authority of your parents, that there will be many times where you will be disappointed. And when you get, if you're married, and if you're seeking marriage, this is so important that, and if you're married, you know. And I say this not to pick on my wife, but on me, as the poor spouse between us. You know that if you turn and you get married and you look to marriage for the weight of your fulfillment, and as your ultimate destiny, and that other person to complete you, and to be your soulmate, and to be your end all be all, you know that marriage is going to be hard and disappointing. That a person and a creature, a parent, a child, a family, fame, money, power, success, beauty, just pick it. It cannot handle the weight of your worship. It can't do it. And in this Psalm to close this point, there is one, there's one major application point.

It's in verse four. It's the prayer. Remember me in the time of your favor, oh God, when you come to save, remember me. And what the Psalm is asking you to do today, all of us, no matter if you're a Christian or not today, this is the call. Just say this prayer. Remember me, Lord, today in the time of your favor and the day of your salvation, because I am a human who has run after all of these different idols across the whole of my life. I keep doing, I keep chasing after them. And so when you come to save, include me, remember me, because my faith is weak, but I'll turn to you today, and I'll trust you. Now he answers at the end of the passage verse 44 to 48 and says, I will remember.

I remember my covenant. I will not break the promise I made from the beginning of time. I will show mercy even though you don't deserve it. There is one place in the Bible where 44 to 48 is quoted, only one. And that's at the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Luke chapter one, Zechariah sings Psalm 106, 45 to 48. And he, when he's told by an angel, your son is going to be the one who will bear the prophecy about the son, Jesus Christ. He turns to God and sings and says, you have remembered me, oh Lord, the day of your favor has come. You have not forgotten your covenant. It's always been about this man, the one that is to come Jesus Christ.

You see the connection, when you read Psalm 106 and you hear the command, pray like this. Remember me, Lord, because I've chased after all these gods and they have not, they couldn't bear the weight of my identity and my needs. Luke one is saying, well, turn your face to Jerusalem and lift your eyes up to the cross of Jesus Christ and know that at the cross, every single one of the little gods, the little things that you worshiped have been crucified in him. Your sins have been cast away and God has actually at the cross, if that is your prayer today, God at the cross, at the moment of the cross in the middle of history turned and said about you from eternity, from everlasting to everlasting, I name you Christian, not by the name of the idol that you worship. And that's an offer today. It's an offer of renewal for you Christian and it's an offer for anybody who would come to trust this man, Jesus Christ, who came to die for you. The reason to follow Jesus Christ today is because you need an object of praise that cannot be crushed under the weight of your expectations. And the God who is also man, who is just merciful, powerful, and forgives, he can handle you. He can handle your worship. Now let me close by asking how to praise God. And if you're a human being today, or if you're a rock or a frog or a wave or a tree or anything, the Psalms tell you praise the Lord. And so we're under the weight of the command.

[28 : 01] And there's so much we could say about this about how to praise God, but I just want to draw four specifics from this passage of ways that this passage actually says you can praise God as we close. There's something, the first is this, there's something more specific about the prayer here. Remember me, oh Lord. And that's that we've already said, remember me, oh Lord, because I have chased after things that are not God. And that means that this is a prayer actually of confession. And we pray to prayer of confession in our service because we see it all across the Bible. And let me use the fact of this here to just give the annual pastor's token charge as we begin the new year. Make 2022, I think this passage is asking us, make 2022 a year of daily prayer and include in that a prayer of confession and repentance before God. It's a command of scripture.

It's a daily duty and a delight to once again, every new morning confess and believe the gospel and dedicate the day to the Lord. And we do it every Sunday and there's a command here, I think, in remember me, oh Lord, because I'm such an idol. I'm such a sinner, a command to go to confession every single day. Secondly, verse two, verse two, remember, ask the question, who can utter all of his praise? Who could possibly name all the things that God is worthy to be praised for? And at the same time, the Psalm goes on to talk about all the things God could be praised for. And that means, I think, this Psalm is calling us this year to praise God by talking about God. And, you know, talk about God, we call theology. That's all it is, is talking about God and talking about things in the light of God. And I think one of the signs of a growing and healthy congregation, and there are five, at least, and we'll do that another day, but is a growth in talk about God, a growth in theological depth, a growth in wanting to talk about God, talk about God this year. That's how we can praise God. God loves, it glorifies God when we talk about God. So seek the face of God by talking about God this year. Third, there's a temptation here, nevertheless, addressed in verse three. So we've taken something from verse one, verse two, and now in verse three, there's a temptation here, and it's addressed in verse three. You could read this passage, the 10 stories about how Israel drifted, and then God remembered, and he saved them anyway, and say, well, if God keeps doing this, it must mean that God has made most glorious every time I sin. And, you know, God, and this is exactly what Paul brings up in Romans. He says, should we keep sinning so that God gets more and more glory for his mercy? And Paul says no. And Psalm 106 says no. Verse three addresses that verse three says that God loves when we love righteousness and justice. And so another way that this song gives us to praise God this year is make it a year of fighting your indwelling sin and seeking to conform to the life of Jesus Christ. Loving righteousness and loving justice is another way. Fourth and finally, and very simply, in verse one and verse 48, the point of the Psalm, we can praise God this year by singing praise to God. Praise the Lord, this passage says, it says it at the beginning and at the end. That's the point here. The assembled people are gathered together, and they're called as the body of God, the body of Christ. Praise the Lord. Sing, praise to the living God. We read the call to worship today from Psalm 106. The reason we have the call to worship is because it's God who calls us to come and to praise him. We don't invite ourselves. He commands, he calls, and there it is. That's how we can worship God this year. I'll give the last word this morning to Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews 12 is a passage about worship and about praising God through Jesus Christ. Hebrews 12 goes so far as to say that when God's people come together like this and sing praise to God, that they cross the threshold and they enter into sacred space and sacred time. We know that that's not because of the building. It's not because we dwell in a temple today. Not at all. Hebrews 12 says why that is the case. It's the case because when the people of God gather, the Holy Spirit of God says, I will be with you. It's a promise.

Again, this frees us from the weight of relying on our feelings as we come to work. Sometimes we can leave here and say, it felt really good today. It felt flat today. There's good and true things about that. But what Hebrews 12 says is, know that when you cross the threshold and enter into worship with God's people, the Holy Spirit has come. God is there no matter how you feel.

If the gospel is preached and the word is open and praises are sung to Father, Son, and Spirit, the Holy Spirit comes to meet with you. That's why worship is so important and so serious. Not only that, but 10,000 times 10,000 myriads of myriads of angels in the church, triumphant, the church, our brothers and sisters who have deceased are there worshipping on that same Sunday every week with us in the heavenly place. So sing to the Lord. Praise the Lord. God is here. The Holy Spirit has come today. He promises and he meets with us now. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And all God's people said, Amen.