



THE GREAT *Halls*

The Great Halls

April 19 -
May 24





THE GREAT HALLELS

A STUDY

Through Psalm 113 to 118

April 19 - May 24

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Written by TJ Johnson

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THE SUPREMACY OF PRAISE - PSALM 113

Praise the LORD!

Praise. What an interesting concept. To allow your heart to overflow with joy because of someone or something of great worth. Praise is not unique to Christianity. The world praises. Men and woman. Boy and girls. Young and Old. Rich and poor. Praise arises from every nation, from every language, from every person on this planet.

What IS unique about Christianity is that we are called to praise...the LORD (Yahweh, Adonai). The first commandment leaves no room for ambiguity, "You shall have no other gods BESIDES ME." Or as Jesus says, ""You shall worship the LORD YOUR GOD and HIM ONLY shall you serve."" Listen to the writer of Hebrews speak of the supremacy of praise: "Through Jesus then let us CONTINUALLY offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."

Praise is what we were made for. Praise is the full enjoyment of that pleasure we all seek after. Praise is the one thing that will outlast all the meager endeavors we have pursued on this earth. Praise is that which God is MOST worthy of.

There is perhaps no greater place in the Bible which stirs our affections for God and calls upon us to express those affections through praise than the book of Psalms. Over the next six weeks we will journey through the Egyptian Hallel (Praise) Psalms: Psalm 113-118. I encourage you to soak in these Psalms and allow the Psalmist to fan the flames of praise in your heart.

Praise the LORD!

Pastor TJ

"You never go away from us, yet we have difficulty in returning to You. Come, Lord, stir us up and call us back. Kindle and seize us. Be our fire and our sweetness. Let us love. Let us run."—Augustine of Hippo

THE GREAT *Offerings*

THE SUPREMACY OF PRAISE

PSALM 113

PS. TJ JOHNSON

The Supremacy of Praise

April 19





Praising our God

- What are the things most praised in the world and why?
- C.S. Lewis once wrote, "The delight is incomplete until it is expressed.". What are some of the ways we can express our delight in God?
- Read Psalm 113:2
What is the difference between v. 2's instruction and our praise of earthly things?
- The sermon states the rhythm of praise is downward in pride and upward in praise. Why must praise be downward and upward?
- Reflecting upon your current situation, do you think, or feel, you are alone in your praising of God? How does a proper understanding of praise help us see the bigger picture? (See also Hebrews 12:1, 18-24; Malachi 1:10-12)
- Read Psalm 113:7-8
How does the rhythm of praise reflect the rhythm of the Gospel?
- How does this Psalm point to Jesus?
- Who is like the LORD our God? Take some time to discuss the great worth of Jesus (See Galatians 3:13; Acts 4:5; Romans 8:3)
- Why is our God worthy of praise? (See Romans 1:20; Psalm 19:1-6)



Praising our God

Going Deeper

- Looking at Psalm 113:7-9, what do they show about the character of our God?
- Reflecting upon the Passion Story, how much does it impress upon you the love God has for humanity?



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

THE GREAT Ovals

THE POWER OF PRAISE

PSALM 114

DR. CHRIS BRANSTETTER

The Power of Praise

April 26



THE POWER OF PRAISE - PSALM 114

There are many problems in this world that make us tremble in fear.

Especially right now, with the world upside down with the virus and with so many financial problems, it is difficult not to feel anxiety and fear.

Psalm 114 comes to us with a revelation of God who make the mountains shake by His presence. It is this same God who wants to come into our lives and shake us free of our chains, addictions, sins, self-idolatry, and fear.

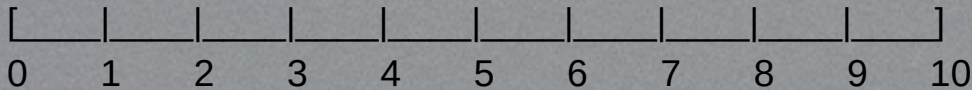
Join us on Sunday as we lift praises to the mighty God of Exodus!

Chris



Trembling before God

- On a scale of 1-10, where would you place your anxiety or frustration levels right now?



- Vv. 3-4 reveals how nature reacts to the terrifying presence of God. What are other examples of nature responding to God?
- What should be our proper response to the presence of God? (See v. 7)
- Could you think of some examples from the Bible of how people responded to the presence of God?
- Have you ever had an overwhelming experience of God's presence?
- Read v. 7 and 2 Cor 7:1
These verses speak of a reverent fear of God, what does this mean and have you experienced it?
- How does a reverent fear of God display praise of God? (See Ps 2:11; 111:10, Rev 14:7 and 15:4)
- How does v. 8 bring hope to our present situation with COVID-19? (See Exod 17:1-7 and Num 20:1-13)
- Do you think we take God's holiness seriously enough?
- Does Psalm 114 speak to you in a different way than you heard in the message?



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

THE GREAT Falls

THE BLESSING OF PRAISE

PSALM 115

The Blessing of Praise

May 3



THE BLESSING OF PRAISE - PSALM 115

Andrew Fletcher once said, "Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who writes its laws." God has written for us a songbook, the Psalms. And the purpose of that songbook is to, through song, write the laws of God on our heart (See Psalm 1). Let us not underestimate the power of song to fuel our hearts in ways nothing else can.

As we come to Psalm 115 we discover just how powerful song can be in motivating us to continue in the faith in the midst of great personal and national tragedy. When we doubt His goodness, it is the songs that call us back into trust. When we faint in fear, it is the songs that strengthen weak knees. When death overshadows us, it is the songs that burst through the darkness with rays of hope.

As the world continues to be effected by Covid-19, let us turn to the Psalms, that we might be drawn back to full assurance of our God.

This week's Psalm, Psalm 115, reminds us that God's glory is our only hope in our tragedy...so it begins, Not to us, Not to us, but to Your name give glory. It is only the glory of God that can rescue our world. Not idols (and yes we still have idols...perhaps now more than ever), they are worthless and we who worship them become like them, useless.

At the heart of this Psalm is a beautiful communal call and response:

Group A - Trust in the LORD.

Group B - He is your help and shield.

It is a call for us to remind one another, through song, that God is still in heaven. He does all that He pleases (He is sovereign). His glory is your great shield of protection. His glory is that which brings blessings to us. So seek His glory and come under it as a chick under its mother's wings.

I encourage you to work your way through this Psalm in preparation for Sunday. As you do so, notice its chiastic structure.

A Communal Prayer (v. 1)
B Taunts of the Faithless (v. 2)
C The Position of God (v. 3)
D The Power of Idols (v. 4-8)
E The Call to Trust (v. 9-11)
D The Power of Yahweh (v. 12-15)
C The Position of God (v. 16)
B Destiny of the Faithless (v. 17)
A Communal Praise (v. 18)

And...don't forget to sing!

Singing with you,

Pastor TJ



Glorifying God

- Considering what is currently happening globally, what scares you the most?
- In all this doom and gloom, how do you motivate yourselves to praise God?
- How does the beginning of this psalm compare with the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples in Matt 6:9b-13 and Luke 11:2b-4? See also Neh 9:5-10 and Num 14:13-17 for more examples of this prayer model.
- Consider v. 1
When we pray, what is foremost in our minds? Is it our problems and lives or is it God and His glory?
- Read v. 2
Considering the psalmist's response to the mocking of God by other nations, how do you respond when people, or even friends and family, deny and mock God?
- Reflection
Consider your current situation. If in some way the continuance of this situation would bring God greater glory, would you be willing to say along with Jesus, "not my will but Yours"?
- Read vv. 3-7
This world is filled with so many idols which even we are in danger of serving. Make a list of idols the world, and even Christians, serve. Then discuss how these idols compare to the glory of OUR God. (Try and draw similar comparisons the psalmist did.)
- Consider vv. 12-15
What do these verses tell us about the psalmist's confidence about what would happen once we submit ourselves to the glory of God?



Glorifying God

- That said, what would our reason be for glorifying God? Promises of glory and riches, or simply God's glory? (Read v. 1 again.)
- The sermon points to the central verses of the psalm (vv. 9-11). What is the main idea of these verses?
- Do you think you would be able to survive life without God at your side?
- How can we use what we have learned today to encourage the people in our lives?



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

THE GREAT Falls

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAISE

PSALM 116

PS. TJ JOHNSON

The Perspective of Praise

May 10



THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAISE - PSALM 116

Praise is not void of a proper understanding of the complexities of life. It does not mean that we ignore our emotions, that we pretend that our problems do not exist, or that we lie (to God or ourselves) about how we really feel about life.

This is perhaps why I love the Psalms so much! The Psalmist, inspired by the Holy Spirit, can bring complaints to God, speak boldly to God, and all the while honestly confess, "I love the LORD." If there is no room for complaint in the church, then there is no room for the Psalms.

In Psalm 116, the Psalmist speaks of his suffering, distress, and anguish. If you listen closely you can almost hear his groanings, the high shrieks of pain, calling out to God. He personifies death and in so doing acknowledges that God had allowed death to pursue him and almost overtake him. He even looks around and sees that although he has escaped death, others (his friends, faithful men and women of God) were not so fortunate.

And yet, it is because of these events, not in spite of them, that He is able to say, "I will call upon the name of the LORD. I will go into the courts of the house of the LORD. Praise the LORD!."

The Psalms, especially Psalm 116, speaks to us today and compels us to consider the perspective of praise...it is much more than happy feelings during happy times.

Praising in the sorrow with you,

Pastor TJ



Praising in Perspective

Read Psalm 116

- How many of us struggle to praise God during difficult times? What do you tend to do instead?
- How can we make sure that we continue to praise God in difficult times?
- Read vv. 1-2, 5-6
How does the psalmist view God? Do you feel the same? Why? (See James 1:17 and Heb 6:18)
- How does God's immutability (unchanging character) comfort you during difficult times?
- Think about the times during which you experienced doubt and despair. Do you think that God forsook you during those times? How do you reconcile feelings of abandonment with Hebrews 13:5-6?
- Reflect
Looking back on times of trouble, difficulty and despair, do you think you were alone? Are you able to see the blessings of God on the other side of your difficulties?

- Read 1 Thess 5:16-18

Why do you think Paul tells the church to do these things at all times, good and bad?

- Have you ever been able to praise God during difficult times? How did you accomplish this?

- Read vv. 1, 3, 8, 10-11

Does the psalmist deny his troubles or acknowledge them? Why do you think that is?

THE GREAT

Hallel

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAISE

20

PSALM 116



Praising in Perspective

- Read Matt 26:36-46

Does Jesus shy away from the difficult time which He was facing? What did He do instead?

- Reflect

Looking at how the psalmist and Christ dealt with difficult times, how could their examples encourage us to change our view and experience of these times?



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

THE GREAT

Hallel

THE PERSPECTIVE OF PRAISE

THE GREAT Shift

THE PEOPLE OF PRAISE

PSALM 117

DR. CHRIS BRANSTETTER

The People of Praise

May 17



THE PEOPLE OF PRAISE - PSALM 117

While Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible it addresses one of the most important and controversial topics in the church today - what it means to be the people of God when the world is screaming for moral compromise.

What is the right attitude of the church toward the world? And how can we find a clear answer not only to our own Christian identity but also to our mission in the world? In two short verses, Psalm 117 tells us what we need most to answer these questions.

Chris



Praising with the Nations

Read Psalm 117

- In what sense do you understand the word 'us' (v. 2a) in your current context?
- Following Dr. Chris' explanation, in what sense did the psalmist understand the word 'us'?
- In which way would we be able to show that God loves all nations and peoples?
- Could you mention a couple of examples from the Old and New Testament which shows God's heart for the nations?
- Reflect
What have you done to draw in other nations/peoples towards Christ?
- Considering Matthew 28:18-20, how does God demonstrate His love for the nations? How did the disciples respond to Jesus' command? In what ways could we be part of the Great Commission?

- Read Acts 8:26-28 & 34-38

How did Philip respond to the Holy Spirit when told to preach the Good News to the Ethiopian Eunuch? How do we respond to God's instruction to preach the Good News to people of other cultures?

- Looking at the story of Jonah, what is the difference between Jonah's and God's perspective to 'unsaved' peoples?

- Read Acts 11:46-47

How did Paul respond in spreading the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles?



Visit www.joshuaproject.net and see how we can change the way we see the world and praise God through praying for the nations.

Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports

THE GREAT

Hallel

THE PEOPLE OF PRAISE

PSALM 117

THE GREAT *Hearts*

THE PERSON OF PRAISE

PSALM 118

PS. TJ JOHNSON

The Person of Praise

May 24



THE PERSON OF PRAISE - PSALM 118

Years ago, Jenni and I decided to try our hand at sailing. We, along with our two sons who were 7 and 6 at the time, travelled up to QingHuangDao for some sailing lessons. At the end of the course we both received sailing certificates. On said certificates were a list of things we had learned that week, one sentence stood out among the others.

"A theoretical knowledge of turning over a capsized sailboat."

On the way home Jenni took a pen to her certificate and proceeded to mark through the word, 'theoretical,' and replaced with it practical. Yes, during that week Jenni actually jettisoned our family into the ocean...ropes tangled around one child... waves crashing against the defeated bow of our ship...sharks circling (well, not really but it felt like it)...and everyone in our family bobbing mercilessly, another at the command of the waves, away from one. We eventually made our way back together and righted the ship so that she could sail once again.

It's certainly a memory we will never forget. Our big take-away, besides the fact that sailing wasn't for us, was that there is a huge difference between theoretical and practical knowledge. We had sat in a class and heard instruction on how to right a capsized ship, and felt we had a good grasp on the mechanics of it all. But when you are out there in the ocean with the waves and the very real danger of it all, it's quite a different experience.

Our faith is a lot like this, it remains in the theoretical category until one day it is tested...and testing eventually comes to us all. A phrase that is repeatedly used in the Bible, and one that you often hear on the lips of believers (often sung on Sundays) is, "God is good." I'm almost certain it's something you have said or sung or certainly believe. It is, for many, a theoretical theology of God. Something easy to say when life is good, when the days are simple, when death and disappointment hasn't weighed you down and cast doubts into that theoretical theology. But for those who have gone through difficult times and can say along with Job, "The Lord give and takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord," it is more than theoretical...it is practical.

This Sunday we end our series with perhaps the most repeated phrase in the Bible, "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His steadfast love endures forever." As the Psalmist meditates upon this thought he calls you to join with him in the praise of God's steadfast, eternal love. We are all in difficult times, bobbing in the dangerous waters of an unforeseen future. Perhaps for many of us our faith has capsized and is in need of being righted. This is an important moment for us...how we proceed now is key to our future.

Now, more than ever, we need to hear the call of the Psalmist... Give thanks to the Lord...for He IS good! The psalmist had seen hard times and yet He was able to say, "He is good." How? What proof did he have that God was good? His hopes weren't in an experience, though those are good. His hopes weren't in head knowledge only, though that is good as well. As you read the psalm you realize that his ultimate hope was in this promised Messianic figure who would come and right every wrong.

Oh, how fortunate we are to live on the other side! Christ HAS come. Christ HAS opened the gates of righteousness that we might enter through them. To KNOW that God is good takes only one action...look to Jesus! Our praise (and thanks) to God is set on the person of praise, Jesus Christ, who ushers us into the places of praise.

The Psalmist is begging you, along with me this coming Sunday, look to Jesus, the goodness of God in flesh, and give thanks!

Pastor TJ



Jesus is the Hope of our Praise

Read Psalm 118

- Read Hebrews 10:11-18 (Focus on vv. 12, 14)
How do these verses show Christ's eternal and steadfast love for us?
- Read Matthew 21:42 where Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22. How do people "reject" Jesus and what, according to Jesus, is the result of that rejection? How do people accept Jesus as the cornerstone (Everlasting Rock - Isa 26:4) and what is the result of that acceptance?
- Read John 3:16 and 15:13
What do these verses tell us about Jesus' love for us?
- In vv. 19-21 the psalmist speaks about being righteous. Are we able to make the same claim? How so?
- Read Romans 5:18
How does Jesus' act of love change our future prospects as sinful believers? What is required of us to achieve this promise?
- Pastor TJ taught that steadfast love is not based on how faithful you are but how faithful Jesus is to Himself. Share of a time when you clearly experienced God's steadfast love.
 - As you think of the eternal (endures forever) love of Jesus, what can you add to the list in Romans 8:34-38?
 - Read vv. 19-20
As you think about the ultimate coronation of Jesus (His second coming) what is it that brings you greatest hope and joy?

THE GREAT

Hallelu

THE PERSON OF PRAISE

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PSALM 118



Jesus is the Hope of our Praise

- The Psalm's main desire is that we would give thanks to God. Take some time to share with the group the things you are thankful for in Jesus Christ.
- Paul wrote the Thessalonians to constantly rejoice in all circumstances. How does this instruction compare to Psalm 118? (See 1 Thess 5:16-18)
- How does the psalmist express God's love?
- The psalmist declares victory over his troubles and enemies. How do you respond when times are tough?
- Read vv. 8-9
Even today we tend to turn to friends and well-respected people in troubled times. How different is the psalmist's response from the norm?
- When do you start trusting someone? What did they do to earn that trust?
- Reflect
The psalmist talks about God being his strength, song and salvation. How do we view God when we become anxious?
 - Have you ever experienced God overcoming your troubles and anxiety? Take some time to share with the group.
 - There are times when people are so overwhelmed by their situation that they wish to end it all. Reflect on how the psalmist responds to a similar situation (see vv. 17-18)
 - The psalmist opens and concludes the Psalm with "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love endures forever" (vv. 1 & 29). How can we use this example in our daily lives?



Prayer & Praise

End your time together by reflecting on the goodness of God and praying for one another.

Prayer Requests

Praise Reports