

Summer Psalms

*“Holy and awesome is his name!
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.”*

Who is the Lord?

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Psalm 111

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Good morning Redeemer. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity of opening God’s Word with you again today. Please turn with me to Psalm 111. As you recall, we are in the middle of a series entitled “the Summer Psalms”. Detrich Bonheffer famously said, the Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible. They were written to God, but in many ways written for us. We learn good prayer through the Psalms. We learn appropriate worship through the Psalms. We learn how to address God. We learn how to cry out of anguish to him. We learn to weep, to sing, to mourn and to celebrate. The Psalms really are the prayerbook of the Bible, and apart from the Lord’s Prayer itself, are the best coach to sound prayer there is. Imitate them – its good for your soul.

What I love about the Psalms is there are truly dual purpose. They are aesthetic and pedagogical, beautiful, and instructive. Who can forget the beauty of Psalm 23 or 139? But the Psalms also teach. This is particularly true about our Psalm today which obviously draws from the wisdom tradition as we will later see. It’s an alphabetical psalm which would have helped with memorization, again evidence of its instructive purpose. The Psalms in general, and as we will see Psalm 111 in particular teach us how to worship, how to address God, and how to respond to Him.

Over the course of the pandemic, and in the last 6 months in particular I have found myself constantly trying to remind myself of who God is. I think that is a natural consequence of when you hit rough times. The believer, when confronted with anxiety, depression, indecision,

uncertainty and hardship naturally HAS TO ASK THEMSELVES, again and again, WHO IS THE GOD IN WHOM I TRUST? Why do I trust Him? Is He mighty to save? Psalm 111 helps us answer that today.

So let us approach the Word of Lord

Great Are the LORD'S Works

Praise the LORD!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He sent redemption to his people;
he has commanded his covenant forever.

Holy and awesome is his name!

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who practice it have a good understanding.

His praise endures forever!

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD, THANKS BE TO GOD.

Psalm 111 is an acrostic psalm. A poem, or properly a song written in 23 lines each starting with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It is also the fraternal twin of Psalm 112, which also is acrostic and begins with the word Halleluiah! Psalm 111 talks about God, and Psalm 112 about the man who trusts and fears God. I would recommend to you today, go home and read Psalm 112. I do believe you will find it encouraging. But this morning we will turn our attention to 111 to answer two questions, WHO IS THE GOD IN WHOM WE TRUST? And once we have answered that in the fashion of Psalm 111 we will try and apply what we have learned about

God's character, nature and actions to the question of HOW DO WE PROPERLY RESPOND TO HIM?

Who is the God in Whom we Trust?

1. The Creator

Firstly we see that God is creator. Verse 2 says “great are the *works* of the Lord” and verse 3 “Full of splendor and majesty is his *work*” vs 4 “he has caused his wonderous works to be remembered”. In fact the ESV translates 5 times God's actions in this psalm as works. It is my impression we are to see 2 meanings here, works in the sense of his creative endeavors and works in the sense of his redemptive endeavors.

We sing “all thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea!” Creation sings God's praises, His creative works display his majesty! I mean, I could go on and on about this! This happens to be my native tongue of praise – being in awe of God's creation through science and the natural world. Sunsets, the complexity and miracle of the human body, geology! All the stuff I like to geek out on, helps me to worship God and right size him.

For example, has anyone heard the new news from NASA, and no it's not a dad joke coming. That's right the James Webb telescope. And so far, its most significant image is the deep field view. This infra-red telescope was pointed at “so called empty” sky and revealed a dazzling display of God's majesty and creative genius. The area of sky is approximate to a grain of sand at arm's length – and it shows literally thousands of galaxies! Imagine what wonders are in all those BILLIONS of galaxies with BILLIONS of stars and planets!!

“By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth, all their host”. Psalm 33:7 ESV

AND

“Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.” Isaiah 40:26

Our God conceived of in his mind and brought into existence by his breath each one of those stars! “GREAT ARE THE WORKS OF THE LORD studied by all who delight in them!” vs 2! Scientist pride themselves on “Discovering” the laws of nature. We say Wow, isn’t Newton incredible! Isn’t Einstein amazing! He discovered gravity. He discovered Relativity! And those minds are incredible. They represent the height of human intellect. But ultimately, BIG DEAL! GOD CONCEIVED OF AND AUTHORED ALL OF THESE NATURAL LAWS AND MORE! God not only came up with the laws themselves, but the power of his hand he executed those laws, putting them into physical existence at creation! What humanity in its entirety over centuries can only observe or describe (and incompletely by the way), God imagined in completeness and brought into being! His intellect and capacity are so exalted, so massive, so imaginative, so powerful it terrifies the human mind! “Great are the Works of the Lord!” Amen?

But God’s staggering intellect and foresight and goodness does not apply merely to HIS physical works. He also provides GOOD MORAL LAWS. Verse 7 instructs us that “all his precepts are trustworthy, they are established forever and ever.” That word precepts means mandate, commandment, laws.¹ Psalm 111 reminds us that our Father in Heaven, God, gives good household rules. Rules designed to keep you and others safe. Rules designed to result in blessing! God is no crotchety hold out! His precepts are trustworthy and true! But don’t take my word for it, ask King David!

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
Psalm 19:7-11

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Psalm 111 is reminding us that God is a loving Father, giving healthy boundaries, willing educating his children and lighting the way of blessing for them. So if you are distressed, look to his law. Find in there the path to blessing, for

“Through your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Psalm 119: 104-105

Isn't it fascinating that we all respect physical laws like gravity. The older I get the more power gravity has over me (is that because of more mass??? $G=G(\text{cons})m_1m_2/d^2\dots$). We all respect gravity etc. But why then do we question God's moral laws? Just like disrespecting gravity leads to fairly consistent and painful consequences, ignoring God's laws has predictable consequences too!

Just look at the consequences of our confused culture ignoring God's Laws about just 3 issues: marriage and family commitment, gender and sanctity of life. Did you know in homes without fathers (often because the male leaves shunning his God Ordained responsibilities) children have higher rates of “(1) Perceived abandonment, (2) attachment issues, (3) child abuse, (4) childhood obesity, (5) criminal justice involvement, (6) gang involvement, (7) mental health issues, (8) poor school performance, (9) poverty and homelessness; and (10) substance use.”ⁱⁱ

Or consider the Gender confusion landscape where just in the last 2 months I've seen articles on increased suicidality among transgender teens and plastic surgeons advertising gender reassignment surgery to minors on ticktok and Instagram!ⁱⁱⁱ

Or consider the how our Culture is prepared to cast away the unwanted, whether the aged with euthanasia or the young with abortion? Did you know 90% of children diagnosed with Down's Syndrome are aborted? This is genetic genocide. What conditions are next? Did you know there is evidence of sex selective abortion in Canada?^{iv}

Can this really be wisdom people? Does our culture have any idea of the consequences of departing from the LORD's ways? I often fear for our future and our children in the coming landscape.

Coming back to Psalm 111 the writer wants us to see departing from his ways is at best risky and at worst devastation. Look! God's rules are for our good! As individuals, and as societies. See that God's awesome creative genius in ordering the natural universe, also extends to the moral universe.

“The works of his hands are faithful and just;
all his precepts are trustworthy;
they are established forever and ever”
Psalm 111

Secondly THE GOD IN WHOM WE TRUST IS THE REDEEMER

2. The Redeemer

Verse 9

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

What does this mean Redeemer? We ought to know! Our church is named after it!!! It literally means to buy back, to purchase.^v It often applies to slaves being purchased out of slavery.

Without question the writer of Psalm 111 wants us to remember the SAVING WORK of God in the Exodus here. GOD IS REDEEMER. He purchases his people out of slavery. As in the preamble to the 10 Commandments:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Exodus 20:2

Dear Christian brothers and sisters. This is more than God's business. It's HIS IDENTITY. It flows out of who He is. He is the freer of the captives. And God is still the same yesterday today and forever.

WS Plummer notes:

“The reference in this clause in no doubt to the redemption from Egypt; but that event in many ways shadowed forth eternal redemption by the Lamb of God.”^{vi}

So living on this side of the cross we see and experience the redemptive nature of God clearer than the Psalmist did:

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,” Eph 1:7

He STILL REDEEMS us from the slavery of sin and from the penalty of Hell through the blood of Christ.

SEE THAT IN OUR PSALM. There is no depth from which he cannot rescue the sinner. Are you discouraged in difficult ingrained sin? Know that God’s innate desire is to liberate you from it. His Heart’s desire is to see you free. And knowing He is the all-powerful creator of the universe do you think His arm is too short to liberate you? Seriously. Stop and think. Maybe like me, You may be saying: Gary, you don’t understand how long this has been going on for – this pattern is so entrenched! Or Gary, you don’t understand how complicated this problem is. Or, Gary so and so can’t change. Or Gary, you don’t know my past. It’s too much. Gary, you don’t understand.

Brother in Christ. Sister in the Lord. I say to you (lovingly, imploringly) you don’t understand who God is. Listen to the Psalm today and ask yourself, Is the root of my discouragement rooted in UNBELIEF? Can you seriously look around at the demonstrated power and might of the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY and believe he cannot manage your particular situation? That He can’t understand? That He can’t solve? That He is too weak? Really???

This is why you need this Psalm today. This is why I need this Psalm today. You see, I have heard or made all those statements you just heard and I need to constantly remind myself of who God is as an antidote to those faithless and diseased statements.

There is a song out there today that has been speaking to my soul like Psalm 111. It’s called King. Listen to it:

Should the day, Begin with Joy, Should it End in Suffering
With Humble Heart, I Lift my Voice
I will Sing, You're Still King

You're Still the Rock of Ages, God over Everything
Even when Evil Rages, You're still the Prince of Peace
You're still Good, You're Still God, Even, if it all Falls Apart
So I'm Gonna Keep on Trusting, You are who You say You are
You're Still King (*Yes, You are*)
You're Still King (*Yes, You are*)

So why should I, have any fear
In a world I know you hold
You've been faithful, for all these years
I have confidence your still on the throne

So all this is to say Christian Brother who is in darkness, Christian Sister under trial. Remember who God is! He is Still the King. He is the Creator – all powerful. He is the Good Law-giver – keeping you on the path of blessing. His ways are right and lead to life! And He is the Redeemer – the one who purchases you out of slavery, and makes you a son or daughter of the Most High!

That is who we pray to! That is who hears our prayers! I have sung that song over and over to myself to coach my faith into life. and that is what Psalm 111 is telling us, that same truth! We need to remind ourselves of who God is. It supercharges our Faith, gives comfort to our souls, and drives us to healthy dependence on him.

That is good news friends. But the Psalmist is not done with us. He answers one more implicit question in the closing verses of this psalm. The question of How do we properly RESPOND to this awesome, powerful, saving God.

How do we properly Respond to this God?

Turn with me to verse 10, the applicaton of all of what the Psalmist has spoken of.

“The **fear** of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;
all those who **practice** it have a good understanding.
His **praise** endures forever!” Psalm 111:10

I think the Psalmist is telling us to do three things:

1. FEAR THE LORD

There is so much to say here about a complex topic. But fear not ☺, no doubt we will encounter this topic again in our series in ACTS with Ananias and Saphira. (a great illustration of why you can't fool or play God!).

But lets first start with what does it mean to fear the Lord? Paul in the sermon workshop provided a useful quote:

“The fear of the Lord is enjoined throughout Scripture, demanding that God’s people stand always in *awe* of him, appreciate his supremacy and greatness, *fear the consequences* of disobeying his will, and *not treat lightly* any aspect of their covenant relationship with him, lest the *consequences be severe or even fatal*. Attempts on the part of some in modern times to define fearing the Lord as merely respecting him distort the biblical evidence.”^{vii}

So the Psalmist is saying, In light of His Creative Genius and Power, In Light of His Moral Superiority, In Light of His Redemptive acts, FEAR HIM. Jesus adds some colour to this concept when he says:

“And do not fear (grk phobos = TERROR) those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matt 10:28

AND the author of Hebrews adds:

“And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Heb 10:30b-31

Make no mistake my friends, Fearing God is not merely respecting him. It's fear, pure and simple. God has the power and moral imperative to judge and punish the wicked, even unto death. Therefore, the psalmist warns and encourages us reminding us, “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” It STARTS there. I can tell you from my personal walk. I was not raised in a Christian home. I believed there was a god at an early age. I worshiped the creator soon after that. But I did not become a Christian until I was aware of, and afraid of, the consequences my own sin.

Let it be clear dear Christian:

“Though there is not always grace [salvation] where there is fear of hell, yet, to be sure, there is no grace [salvation] where there is no fear of God.” John Bunyan^{viii}

Fear of the Lord, Indeed TERROR of His Judgement is NECESSARY FOR SALVATION.

I wonder if that is what modern day evangelism is lacking. We spend a lot of time talking about the love of God as we should! But we have neglected HOLY FEAR. Certainly our culture doesn't fear the final judgement... so how can they feel the need for God. What I am asking you to consider here is, if our evangelism and apologetic LACKS A CONVINCING ARGUMENT TO FEAR GOD, we have missed one of the first steps! "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"

So Fear the Lord and teach others to do so.

Secondly, the Psalmist encourages in light of this fear of the LORD, we ought to:

2. OBEY THE LORD

"all those who practice it have a good understanding" Psalm 111:10

Those who practice wisdom, who do life on the foundation of the fear of the LORD will naturally do His will. Listen to St Augustine:

"He who has a filial (aka fatherly) fear of the Lord, tries to do his Will. Different is the fear of servants; servants fear for the penalty, children fear for love of the father. We are children of God; let us fear Him from the sweetness of charity, not from the bitterness of dread." Augustine of Hippo^{ix}

So Fear Him in the good sense in which a child fears his father, which leads to obedience!

BECAUSE IT IS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD!!!

REMEMBER:

"all his precepts are trustworthy!"
Psalm 111:7

AND Psalm 19 of DAVID

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

Moreover, by them [his commands] is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward
Psalm 19:7, 11

David is saying: OBEEDIENCE KEEPS US OUT OF THE PIT OF SIN AND MISERY – We are warned!

John Calvin says it this way:

“Nothing is more powerful to overcome temptation than the fear of God.” - John Calvin
Godly Fear encourages obedience. 2 weeks ago, Pastor Levi preaching on Psalm 76 said this.
“If the fear of the Lord was primary, there is an awful lot of things that we do in the dark that we would not do anymore”. Well and helpfully said.

But David says more, not only do we avoid the pit,
He says: OBEDIENCE IS THE PATH TO BLESSING – in keeping them there is GREAT
REWARD!

God’s ways are right (finish it for me) and lead to life! Amen Amen!

Consider Jesus’s opening to the Sermon on the Mount. All the beatitudes are implied imperatives. Implied commands, all rooted in obedience to the precepts and Laws of God. The blessing comes through obedience to his Word and mimicking His Character.

Happy, Blessed is the poor in spirit

Happy, Blessed is the one who mourns

Happy, Blessed is the meek

Happy, Ble is the hungry and thirsty

Why? Because there is reward for obedience: the Kingdom of Heaven, comfort, an inheritance, a satisfaction of hunger and thirst. This is an ancient truth, one we would do well to rediscover!

And so we see three things are linked. A pretty straight forward equation actually for the math folks out there:

FEAR + OBEDIENCE = BLESSING

Finally, the Psalmist commends us to:

3. PRAISE THE LORD

The Psalm starts and finishes with gratitude and praise.

Verse 1:

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

Verse 10c

His praise endures forever!

This ought to be the response of the Believer to the realities of God the Creator and Redeemer. So that's what we are going to do Redeemer City Church. Praise him! Praise him intelligibly, in light of who he is, and what he has done!

A. Praise him for His wondrous creative works vs 1-4.

- a. Praise him the beauty we see when camping. Praise him for complexity and majesty of the heavens and stars. Praise him for our wonderful bodies!

B. Praise him for His Redemptive Works vs 6.

- a. He saves people out of slavery and sin. Praise him because he sent His own Son to die for us!

C. Praise him for His Provision of Daily Bread vs 5. Never take that for granted

D. Praise him for His Good Law vs 7. His ways are right and lead to life!

E. Praise him for His constancy vs 10.

- a. You're still the rock of ages God over everything, even when evil rages your still the prince of peace, you're still Good, you're still God, even when it's falling apart, so I'm gonna keep on trusting you are who you say you are, you're still King!

Know who your God is.

REMEMBER who your God is.

And RESPOND to who your God is.

REMEMBER, RESPOND. Pretty simple reading guide to all the psalms isn't it?

Remember He is Large. He created everything.

Remember He is in Charge. He has made good laws – His ways are right and lead to life!

Remember He is Redeemer. He forgives and purchases YOU out of the slavery of sin

And In light of that:

Respond with Godly Fear

Respond with Happy Obedience

Respond in a life of Praise

ⁱ Enhanced Strong's dictionary as accessed through Olive Tree App

ⁱⁱ **Father-Absent Homes: Implications for Criminal Justice and Mental Health Professionals**

https://www.mnpsych.org/index.php?option=com_dailyplanetblog%26view%3Dentry%26category%3Dindustry%2520news%26id%3D54

ⁱⁱⁱ CMAJ June 06, 2022 194 (22) E767-E774; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.212054>

Gender Surgeons on TikTok, Instagram: Appropriate or Not?

https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/976863?src=WNL_infocu1_220806_MSCPEDIT&uac=69049CZ&impID=4503312&faf=1

^{iv} Sex ratios at birth after induced abortion. CMAJ June 14, 2016 188 (9) E181-E190; DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.151074>

^v Enhanced Strong's dictionary as accessed through Olive Tree App

^{vi} WS Plummer. Studies in the Psalms" Geniva Commentary Series. pg 980.

^{vii} Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* in Volume of 2 of The New American Commentary, (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2006), 240.

^{viii} https://www.preceptaustin.org/the_fear_of_the_lord

^{ix} St Augustine: On the Fear of God and True Humility. <https://fsubelmonte.weebly.com/st-augustine.html>