

Psalm 111**“Praise the Covenant-Keeping God”**

Imago Dei Church, 12/27/15

Introduction

Good morning Imago Dei! I trust you are doing well and have had a great Christmas. Alicia and I were able to spend time with my side of the family last week, and now much of her family is in town, so we're just gonna keep the party going.

If you're here and you're a guest, we are glad you are with us. We are church that loves to celebrate Christmas all year around. And by that I don't mean we like to sing Christmas carols and drink eggnog in July (unless you're weird like the Prietos). But I mean that Christmas is a time when we celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world to save sinners, and we very much like to celebrate that. This is the gospel story, and our mission statement is that we desire to see lives changed by the gospel.

So this morning we're going to keep celebrating Christmas in Psalm 111. We've been preaching through some of the Psalms, and this week we start a series of the Hallal psalms—"praise psalms." We're going to address two this morning, Psalms 111 and 112.

Both of these Psalms are acrostic Psalms. Each line begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This was a way of "rhyming," of sorts, in Hebrew poetry,

that would aide in memory and add complexity and beauty.

What this means for us is that when we're interpreting these psalms, we need to look for themes rather than a flow of thought. Constrained by the structure, the author might jump around from thought to thought, depending on which letter comes up next. But he would stick with his theme.

Big Idea: We should praise the covenant-keeping God of Israel (and Jesus) for his works and words.

(1) PRAISE THE LORD (111:1)

The Psalmist begins with a call to praise. He invites the hearers (and readers) to join him. From the beginning you and I are confronted with a choice, an invitation. Will we participate or will we retract? Will we also give thanks and praise to this God, or will we choose to worship and praise someone else.

If you're here and you're not a Christian—maybe you haven't gone to church in a while but decided to because it's around Christmas ... or maybe someone invited you ... or maybe you just wandered in without knowing anyone here ... regardless, we are glad you are with us—and I want to make it very clear from the beginning that this psalm is our invitation to you. We want you to praise the Lord with us. As we'll see in this psalm, we think our

greatest joy and good is found in worshiping this God. He is worthy of your worship, and he is gracious and loving to all who call on him. So unashamedly we want to invite you to praise with us. He doesn't disappoint.

Two aspects of biblical worship.

The first is **personal affection**. The psalmist worships with his "whole heart." This is no dead, lifeless singing. This is no rote recitation of creeds and hymns, but heartfelt affection and devotion to a God that he loves.

(ILL) *The Sandlot* – Squits "can't take this no more" when he sees Wendy Peffercorn. Hatches elaborate plan to lay a giant kiss on the beautiful lifeguard. (SN: Alicia and I often find ourselves sating something like this about our son...because he's awesome.)

Secondly, this worship is marked by **corporate participation**. It's a collective thing. The psalmists' identity is primarily a corporate one, with the people of God. When we read the Bible we understand that much of what passes as American Christianity would not be recognizable to the people of God found in the Bible, much less to the majority of Christians around the world today. The "just me and Jesus" brand of Christianity is utterly unrecognizable to those who walked with God in the Scriptures, including this Psalmist. That's one of the reasons we say often at Imago Dei that we have 2 things to offer people: gospel and community.

So this worship is overflowing with personal affection, but finds its truest fulfillment in the community of believers.

(APP) Now some of us need to work on one or the other of these, and sometimes both.

So the psalmist is worshiping out of personal devotion, but he does so in the context of his corporate identity, with the congregation. Now, what is it that he praises the Lord for? Why does he worship? Let me give you two encouragements from Psalm 111 for why to praise the God of the Bible.

The meat of Psalm 111 breaks roughly into two sections: verses 2-7a focus on the works of God, while verses 7b-9 focus on the words of God, his commands and promises and teachings.

In each of these sections, the context for the psalmist's praise is the covenant relationship God has with his people. In fact, in each of these sections God's covenant is mentioned explicitly (vv. 5 and 9). So while some psalms call all the earth to praise God, this psalm is a call to praise God because of the grace and mercy experienced by those who are in a covenant relationship with him. So, first,

(2) PRAISE THE LORD FOR HIS COVENANT WORKS (111:2-7A)

The consistent theme of verses 2-7a are the *works* of God. God's works are mentioned in verses 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7. And, what's interesting about this psalm is that it differs slightly from how God's works are often portrayed. Often when talking about the works of God—especially when talking about the “greatness” of God's works—the focus is on the works of creation. God's power and majesty are clearly seen in creation, so he is to be praised as Creator.

But here the works are different. This psalm was likely sung during the celebration of the Passover meal. The people of God would look back on their history and see God deliver them from slavery in Egypt, and in doing so they also predicted the final deliverance God would give them in rescuing them from sin and rebellion through Jesus Christ.

Thus we see the focus on God's grace and mercy (4b), his covenant provision (5a), his covenant faithfulness (5b). Look in verse six ... we see that his power is seen clearly by whom? His people! Not the power that could be seen by looking at the natural world, but the power that can be seen in his covenant works. Specifically, in verse 6, “in giving them the inheritance of the nations.” This was the covenant promise made with Abraham, and then reiterated through Moses, that God would establish

through Israel a people that would be God's chosen people through whom God would bless the entire earth.

This was partially fulfilled in bringing the people of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, but we know from reading the Scriptures that it is most fully realized in the person and work of Jesus. He was born as a Jew and received and fulfilled all the promises made to them as the people of God. He is the true Israelite, and he is the one who shows the covenant works of God in all of their glory.

So even though you and I may not be Jewish in our ethnicity, we can receive the blessings and benefits of God's covenant works by being united with the true Israel, Jesus Christ.

So the focus of this praise is not the creation or natural works of God, but the covenant and redeeming works of God. How, then, should we respond to God's covenant works.

Stand in awe of them. Though he doesn't state it exactly like this, it's clear that the Psalmist is taken aback by the majesty of God's covenant works. They are described as ...

“great” (2)

“full of splendor and majesty” (3)

“wondrous” (4)

“powerful” (6)

“faithful and just” (7)

The reality is, the more intimately acquainted we become with the saving works of God, the more and more awestruck we become. Some people and even some churches get this backwards. They think we need to always be looking for something new to keep Christianity interesting.

(ILL) Someone (dad) sent me a video of a church who did a Star Wars nativity this Christmas because they wanted the Christmas story to be “relevant.”

That’s just one of many examples of how attempts to make Christianity relevant always devolves into one of two things: it either leads to gimmicks and banality (foolishness) OR to compromising the truths of the faith to make them more tolerable to peoples’ ears. Neither one of these honors Christ, and both of them reflect a failure to properly behold the majesty and power of God.

The covenant works of God are *infinitely* relevant to your life and mine and they need no gimmicks: **sin**...forgiven in the death of Christ! **Death**...defeated in the resurrection of Christ! **Power over sin**...provided in the giving of the Holy Spirit! **Shame?** Christ has experienced shame for you so that you can experience

the love and affection and worth God places on you! **Despair and depression?** God has promised that Christ will return and wipe every tear of from our eyes and he will make all things new!

Why would we EVER compromise these truths?! And why would we ever become bored with them?! May it not be so among us, church! Let the covenant works of God inspire awe in your life. How?

Study them. We know God and his works by studying them. The covenant works of God are infinitely deep, and no one can ever exhaust the riches and depths of them. No one.

Now, this is quite simple, so I won't spend a lot of time on it, but let me just say a word of encouragement for you. God is not far off. He can be known. His works can be studied, no matter who you are. You don't have to be a seminarian to study this God. He is your God, too.

And if you're not a Christian, you can still study and consider the works of this God. In fact, I would encourage you to find someone here and ask them if they will talk with you about the things this God has done.

Remember them. Look in verse 4. As we study the works of God and stand in awe of them, let's be sure to remember them. How often in Scripture the failure of God's people is to forget the saving character and works

of God. They forget his holiness, his jealousy over them, his love for them, or his commands to them.

Often this forgetfulness is a sign that we have lacked the proper awe, and we have failed to appreciate and study his mercy and grace. We are invited to know this God, and to remember his mighty acts.

So, praise the Lord for his covenant works. But also,

(3) PRAISE THE LORD FOR HIS COVENANT WORDS (111:7B-9)

I actually don't want to spend a lot of time on this one, but we should point out that there is a shift that happens in the second part of verse 7. The psalmist moves from talking primarily about the covenant works of God to the covenant words of God.

He moves from what God has done to what God has said, but the two are connected. In verse 7, the works of God are faithful; they are reliable. And what about his words? They are trustworthy. Both his works and his words are reflections on his character. They are consistent with who he is.

That's why in verse 4 we see that God is gracious and merciful. His saving works reveal him to be so. And in verse 9 God is holy and awesome.

So what does he do with these words? Well, in verse 9 he sends redemption. His covenant—which verse 9 says he has “commanded,”—compels him to send redemption to rescue his covenant people. What we see here is that God has bound himself to his words. And over and over again in Scripture God enters into covenants with his people to send a final redemption, a rescue, a salvation. We see it in Genesis 3 ... Genesis 12 ... the life of Moses ... the covenant with David ... the Psalms of David (cf. Psalm 110!) ... over and over again God promises a fulfillment of this covenant to rescue his people and bring them into right relationship with himself.

And the story of the Bible and the message of Christianity is that the covenant words of God will not fail, indeed they have not failed. Because in fulfillment of all those covenant promises, in the fullness of time, God send forth Jesus Christ his only Son to be born with all the limitations of human frailty. And instead of failing where we fail and rebelling against God like we have rebelled against God, this Jesus lived the life we should have lived but could not, and died the death we ought to have died, he defeated our final enemy, death, by rising from the grave, and he has made a way for all who enter into a covenant relationship with God through him to be made right with God.

This is the story of Scripture, the fulfillment of the covenant words of God, and the reason why we praise the Lord!

CONCLUSION: THE LIFE OF PRAISE (111:10)

He also **invites us to participate in his covenant through obedience to his words**. Just as his covenant endures forever, so his word endures “forever and ever” in verse 8. The way we participate in this covenant is by receiving it, by agreeing to it and walking in it.

If you are here today and you are not a Christian, we want you to know that a covenant relationship with this God is held out to you today through the work of Jesus on your behalf. You can be reconciled to the God who created you, the God who is worthy of your worship and devotion, and the God who will not disappoint.

You are invited into a life of relationship with this God, this covenant-keeping God, if you will receive what he has offered.

Here in Psalm 111 the people of God receive his trustworthy words and walk in them. For us, that means first and foremost receiving the terms of his covenant: that he has sent his Son to die for us and redeem us for himself and worship him rightly as Lord of our lives. Our response is to turn from our sin and believe that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord, the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises to his people.

And if you're here and you are a Christian, the response you have to a passage like this is to live the life of praise as seen in verse 10. Psalm 111 turns into a wisdom psalm here, showing us how to live. We walk in the "fear of the Lord." This is not disconnected from the life of praise, but is the manifestation of it. As we reflect on the awesome covenant works of God and receive the gracious and trustworthy words of God, we revere him, we worship him, and "practice" this fear daily in our lives.

And what we'll see in the next Psalms is what it looks like when we walk in this fear.