

Humility of the Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 2024

Preacher: Ciaran Kelleher

[0 : 00] Thank you very much for your welcome and prayers. Let me bring the greetings of Grace Church Montrose. We are a free church of Scotland congregation up on the east coast. If you don't know Scotland at all, there's Aberdeen, which is way north, and we're just a little bit south of them, a nice little seacoast town.

We actually haven't come from Montrose today, we've actually come from Ireland. My accent might deceive you, but I am a very proud Irishman, and I'm very sad not to be there right now, but glad to be with you all. So please keep open that passage you've got in front of you. We're looking at Psalm 113 today.

And this is where we begin. Let me tell you about, there was this photo, it was about 11 years ago, July 2013. It kind of went a little bit viral. It was this picture of the Queen.

The Queen was visiting Kendal, this town in the Lake District in England. As she was visiting the town, she was walking along the line where she encountered a Fijian soldier.

You see, she was walking along the line of the 1st Battalion of the Lancaster Regiment, and they were all standing at attention before her, except for one, which was this Fijian soldier.

[1 : 09] Because you see, where they were all stood straight, what he had done is he had sat down before her, closed his eyes, bowed his head, and started clapping.

You see, for him, for Fijians in their culture, that's the way that you honour someone who is an authority, someone who is above you, is to get down, bow your head, and clap them.

As you look over the broad scope of the Bible, the language, the pictures, the imagery of worship, is always of bowing down.

It is of laying yourself prostrate before God. Because in that way, we say, he is worthy.

Because he is supreme. Because he is sovereign. Because he is Lord. This is the way that worshippers acknowledge the supremacy and the majesty of God.

[2 : 27] But I want you just to return with me back to Kendall, July 2013. And instead of imagining that Fijian soldier in front of the Queen, I want you for a moment to imagine that you are that Fijian soldier.

And you've got down, you've sat down, crossed your legs, bowed your head, closed your eyes, you're clapping. And then I want you to imagine that after you've done that, you lift up your head. And I want you to imagine that as you open up your eyes, you see the Queen has got down on her, sat down in front of you, and is looking right into your eyes.

That brings us right into the dynamic of this psalm that we've got here. But more than that, that brings us right into the dynamic of the gospel itself.

The good news about Jesus. Because what we encounter in this psalm, the God that we worship, as we take these words as our own, the God that we meet in Jesus Christ, that is the picture.

[3 : 49] You see, here's the big thing that we're going to see today. As we work our way through this psalm, is that the Lord lowers himself. The Holy One humbles himself.

The sovereign stoops down. The transcendent condescends to us. The God who gives himself, we are going to meet the God who gives himself in self-sacrificial love to us.

And through the psalm, as we work our way through this, we are not just going to see how we worship God, but primarily, what we're going to see today is the God who meets us when we come to worship him in spirit and in truth.

As was mentioned, this is the beginning of a little series working through a section of psalms. The psalms is a book in the Old Testament of the Bible. This is the prayers, the songbook of the people of God.

And this little selection here, Psalms 113 to 118, they're known as the Egyptian Hallel Psalms. Hallel is just the old word, the Hebrew word for praise.

[5 : 12] So you've ever heard anyone saying, hallelujah, just what we have sang before. That means praise the Lord. And these are known as the Egyptian Hallel Psalms because these are the songs that the people of God, Israel would sing when they gathered for this festival that was known as the Passover.

The Passover is when the people gathered once a year to remember this, the events, the defining event for the people of Israel when God liberated his people from backbreaking, hope-sapping slavery in Egypt and brought them out of that to be his very own people.

If you're ever reading through the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke, the accounts of Jesus' life, there might be a little line that you just zoom by but maybe not pay too much attention to, but it's when they're gathering together for the Passover meal, the night before Jesus' death.

And it says this, that they sang a hymn together. And in all likelihood, it was these songs, Psalms 113 to 118.

You see, what they would do is they'd sing Psalm 113 and 114 just before they had the Passover meal. And after the Passover meal, they'd then sing 115 to 118.

[6 : 46] Now, I know the series here is called From the Lips of Jesus because this is a reminder to us as we work our way through these Psalms over the next few weeks, as you gather here Sunday by Sunday, hear these Psalms preached.

One of the important things for us to remember is this, was Jesus singing these Psalms? And in all likelihood, these were the Psalms that Jesus himself sung the night before he knew he was going to the cross to die.

When we worked through these Psalms ourselves up in Grace Church Montrose, I called these the King's Last Hallelujah. I like a little bit of a word play because you see, the night before his death, Jesus didn't have a last hurrah, but he led his people to praise the Lord.

And that's what we're going to do is we work our way through this, hear this, and we will all take these words as our own and sing them to the praise of God. I've got two points for us today, so if you're note takers, two nice and simple points.

And the first one is this, praise our God. Praise our God. So here's a helpful tool for us as we, in our Bible reading kit, it might seem obvious, but sometimes I've learned saying the obvious is really helpful to do.

[8 : 11] If you see a word repeated over and over and over again, then maybe we should pay attention to it. If we see a word repeated, we can be confident that it's important.

You might think of it in these words. If I'm sat at home on the couch watching Ireland beat South Africa in the rugby and I hear, Kieran, Kieran, Kieran, Kieran, I know something is important, it's happening.

You see, I'm being summoned. And here, we are being summoned to praise God. Look at these first couple of verses. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

Praise the name of the Lord. Let the name of the Lord be praised. The name of the Lord is to be praised. Five different times we see that here. We are being summoned to praise here.

But maybe we might just pause and ask a question. So we're being called to praise the Lord. But this might be a question that you've been asked before.

[9 : 17] Maybe it's a question you've wanted to ask, but you never wanted to say it loud because it doesn't sound like a Christian thing to do. But does God need to be praised? We're told that we need to praise God, but does God himself need to be praised?

How would you answer that question if someone asked you? What would you say to them? Well, here's my answer. Well, no.

Of course, he doesn't need to be praised. God is the one who is perfectly and eternally happy. He is the one who is in perfect and in eternal harmony.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit joined together in beautiful and perfect love. No, he doesn't need our praise, but he deserves it.

He deserves our praise. For what and who he is, for what he is doing for us, what he has done for us, and what he will do for us.

[10 : 28] But I think we could also take this in a slightly different direction. God doesn't need our praise, but we do need to give it.

You see, we are worshipping creatures. We always want to give ourselves, devote ourselves to something. As Augustine, that great doctor of the soul, some of you might have heard this before, as he said, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

You see, there's a trajectory of the heart, a compulsion to worship something, to adore it, to give ourselves over to it, to sacrifice ourselves to something.

And only God, only God, the true God, the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, only he, the one who has called us, cleansed us, and claimed us as his very own.

Only he can satisfy our hearts. But I want us just to focus on verses two to three for a moment.

[11 : 45] Do you notice there's kind of like a little bit of a sandwich here. Let the name of the Lord be praised, beginning of verse two, and then the end of verse three, the name of the Lord is to be praised.

See that there? Praise, name of the Lord, name of the Lord praised. This is kind of a feature of the Psalms. It's a feature of kind of Hebrew poetry, where they sandwich things, and they want you to focus in on what's going on here in the middle.

And have a look at what the saying here in the middle tells us a bit about the nature of our praise of this God. We are to praise him both now and forevermore, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets.

Both now and forevermore, we worship an eternal God, no beginning, no end, and our worship is to match that as best as we can.

But it's not just about time, but it's also about geography. You see that there, from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets.

[12 : 56] You'll all know the saying, won't you? The sun never sets on the British Empire. But one day, it will.

One day, the British Empire will fade. The sun will set on us. But God doesn't just dwell over Britain. God doesn't just dwell over Israel.

God sits enthroned over his eternal kingdom, over everything. And when we are called to praise him, from the setting of the sun to its dawning and all the way around, we join in with the praise of creation, as the way the world was meant to be.

But what are we praising? Does this look strange to you? It says we're to praise the name of the Lord.

It doesn't say that we praise the Lord, but we praise the name of the Lord. You might have seen my little man running around here. He was born last year, and when we were thinking about naming him, we finally came to, we called him Ruan Fraser Padder Kelleher.

[14 : 13] So Fraser Padder, they're his middle names, and they come from our family, different people within our family, Fraser and Padder. Padder is just Irish for Peter. But there was no real inherent meaning to those names that we chose them for.

We tend to impose meanings on names, don't we? So when my wife, Sarah, she suggested, the name Oliver for a boy. I say, no way.

I knew an Oliver when I was seven years old, and I'm not calling any child of mine that. Apologies for any Olivers who are in here, who are watching online. But back here, names functioned differently.

They told us about the character of an individual, or the purposes of a person. So Peter meant rock, that it was on the profession of Peter, that Jesus would build his church.

And the name of the Lord here, you can see it there, in all capitals, is Yahweh. Yahweh, Yahweh, in Hebrew, means, I am that I am.

[15 : 28] I was that I was. I will be what I will be. It means two things, chiefly. First, that God is self-existent.

God is self-existent. God is self-existent. God is self-existent. God is self-existent. My life, your life, all our lives, are dependent on something that is external to us.

The oxygen that we breathe, the food that we'll eat after the service today, the water that we drink. But God himself depends on him and him alone.

You see, when God first reveals his name, there's a story in the book of Exodus, where Moses encounters a flaming bush. And that flaming bush is a picture of this, because you see, the bush was a flame, but nothing was burning.

For a fire to keep going, it must consume up something for energy, but it wasn't consuming anything, because it was a picture of the self-existent God. I am who I am.

[16:27] Because you see, not only is God self-existent, but he is unchanging. Unchanging. Who he was then, he is now. Who he will be in the future, he is now. Who he was before the world began, he is now.

Who he will be when the world ends and we are with him in glory, that is who he is right now. And there are two chief things in particular. He is unchanging in his character and in his promises to us. And what we are doing here when we are saying, praise the name of the Lord, praise the Lord, we are inviting one another to do this.

And when you look throughout scripture, there's three principal directions that we sing. We sing directly to God. We say, you are worthy, you are good.

But we can also sing to ourselves. Bless the Lord, oh my soul. So we sing upwards, inwards, but we can also sing outwards as well.

[17:42] Before we were in Montrose and before that, before we were in Brossy Ferry and before that, we were in St. Andrews. You know, St. Andrews is known as England's most northerly town and it's also known as the 51st state of America.

There's a lot of Americans there and there was a lot of Americans in our church. One was a good friend of mine. And seeing the way that scripture spoke about how we sing out towards one another, so persuaded by that, what he would do then during church is when there were songs about singing to one another, he would look around and other people.

He would flash his pearly whites and try to encourage one another. Now all the Brits, as you can imagine, put up their blinkers and said, please don't look at me. This is really uncomfortable. But what we are doing when we take these words as our own, as we sing them and we will sing these words afterwards, we are encouraging one another.

Praise the name of the Lord because he is worthy to be praised. And what are we singing when we sing this psalm? And this is where we're going to move into and this is the meat of this psalm.

We are calling on one another to come and see the incomparable gods, the peerless one. Because if our first point is this, praise our God, our second point is this, for who is like the Lord our God?

[19:07] For who is like the Lord our God? And so for our note takers this morning and even those who aren't taking notes, this is it. This is what I want you to take away from today's sermon. This is what I want.

If you only remember this, this is brilliant. God is both high and humble. He is both lifted up and lowly.

High and humble, lifted up and lowly. This is the God that we meet when we worship him through Jesus Christ. We know this, that God is most holy.

He is most just. He is most wise. But the particular focus in this psalm, as we call on one another to praise the Lord, we are saying to one another, see his sovereignty, see his majesty, behold his power and his authority.

Have a look at me in verses four to five. The Lord is exalted over all the nations, his glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God? The one who sits and thrones on high, who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth.

[20:34] God is supreme and transcendent. He is the one who looks down from the heights. And this isn't a geographical descriptor here. So it's not that he's going to pass the moon or he's beyond the Milky Way.

This here refers to his dominion, his rule. You see, he is enthroned enthroned as the reigning king over all the cosmos, over all the universe, over all the earth, over all our lives.

And actually, it's important to remember that this describes Jesus. Jesus as he was before he came to live on earth.

Jesus as he is as the resurrected king. the one who is in the form of God. The one who has been exalted above every other name in all of creation.

You see, no politician, no empire, no multinational corporation, no army, nothing, no one compares to the Lord our God.

[21:47] In some senses, we might just think to ourselves, this is a rhetorical question. There's no real answer to this. No one can compare to him.

Sometimes, after I've watched highlights of Ireland being amazing at rugby, this is the last comment on that one today, I look at the comment section on different highlights, whether that's rugby, American football, another type of football, whatever it is.

And you see, one of the comments that always strikes me is you talk about this. If a player has done really well, it says this. He's gone into God mode today. And all I think to myself when I read that is what a low, impoverished, diluted view of God that is.

You see, God isn't just an amplified version of ourselves. He's not Clark Kent after taking off the suits and putting on his cape. God is above and beyond us.

But it's not just the rhetorical question here. Actually, it gives us a slightly surprising answer. Have a look with me at verse 6. So we'll go through from verse 5.

[23 : 09] Who is like the Lord our God, the one who sits enthroned on high? And then look at verse 6. Who stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth.

That word there for stoop down, that literally means to humble, to lower, to abase yourself.

And what do we see here? God comes down, stoops down low, humbles himself, abases himself. He enters into our mess to look at us, look into the eyes of his people. In verses 7 to 9 here, the psalmist, the person who wrote this psalm, they evoke stories and examples of God entering into and serving the lowly.

Like Joseph, taken from a hole in the ground, taken from slavery and prison, and seated with the princes of Egypt.

[24 : 31] Or King David, the forgotten son who was made king over Israel. But verse 7 here in particular, he raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

And this language is actually taken directly from the song of a woman called Hannah. There's a book in the Old Testament called One Samuel. And it opens up with the story of Hannah, this lady who had fertility issues.

She couldn't bear children. And she was mocked. And she was slandered. And God in his grace and kindness gave her a son whom she named Samuel.

And this is the song that she sang. that God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. He seats them with princes, with the princes of his people.

And what I want to say here, as these words are put down in the psalm for us to sing, these words here, verses 7 to 9, these are not promises of what God is going to do for us.

[25 : 52] But these are pictures of his grace to his people and a reminder of the way he comes low to meet us in our mess when we are face down in the mud.

So if there are people here this morning, we've got family or friends, who might be struggling with fertility.

Verse 9 doesn't say to you that God doesn't love you because of that. But it's saying look at the way that he's loved and cared for people in the past.

This is a picture of his grace to his people. You see, God has acted in history. And supremely, we see that in the way that he acted through his son, Jesus.

You see, so much of religion, isn't it, is so often we think that there's this ladder that we've got to climb and clamber our way up. and that maybe, just maybe, we might get to the top in time and we might just meet God at that moment.

[27 : 20] What an amazing picture we get in this psalm that says to us that God comes down to meet us because we just cannot get up that ladder. we've tried and we've fallen and we've slipped down and we just cannot do it.

And God comes down to meet us and encounter us in his grace. But just have a look at the imagery there.

It says this, he raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. Ash heap could also be the refuse. Whatever it exactly means, you see, both of these are materials, whatever they are, they get thrown out.

They're kind of things that get caught up on the bottom of your foot that you try to wipe off. before you go in and stand on the carpet. Things that get thrown out, forgotten about.

And what we're told here is that the dust, the ash heap, which is fleeting, unimportant, that's where God comes down to meet us.

[28 : 36] Let me tell you about a lady called Josephine Butler quickly. Josephine Butler was lived in the 19th century. She was born into a well-to-do family.

Her father was a cousin of a prime minister during that time. She married a Church of England vicar, lived with him in Oxford, then moved to Cheltenham, wasn't really taking a step down, and then finally he got a job in Liverpool.

Now, no offence to anyone who's from Liverpool, but it was a major step down from both Oxford and Cheltenham. And when she moved there, she went to a workhouse.

Now, if you've never heard of what a workhouse is, a workhouse was the kind of place that women who couldn't survive in the streets anymore, that's where they went to. This was the last chance saloon. They did very basic, hard, manual labour.

The workhouse she went to was a place that they did oakum picking. You know, the ropes that they throw into the docks, they pull those out and there was little tiny material that they would have to take out with their hands. It was really hard work.

[29 : 45] And she came and sat down with them in their circle while they were doing this one day, and they laughed at her, dressed well amongst the women that everyone else had forgotten about.

But she kept coming back, and they started taking her seriously. Fast forwarding, she met a young woman in that group called Mary Lomax who just couldn't cope anymore.

So she and her husband took Mary into their home. They fed her, clothed her, and welcomed her in. One day, Josephine Butler's husband was speaking to her, and Mary Lomax said this, Sir, you have brought me into your beautiful home.

You have treated me as if I was your own daughter, as if I had never done anything wrong. I have seen Jesus in you.

A dust in scripture means that which is fleeting and unimportant. death. But it also can be a picture of death. Remember what we said, Jesus sang this, he prayed this on the night before he went to the cross, as he confronted his own death.

[31 : 17] death. Jesus, the Lord, lowers himself to the dust.

He lowers himself to death to lift us up to life. as Paul, who was one of the leaders in the early church, said, writing to the church in Philippi, he said this, that Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Or, as he says elsewhere, is that we have been raised up with Christ Jesus, seated with him in the heavenly realms.

God raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash. You see, everyone who puts their trust in Jesus is raised up from the dust and from death to live with him.

The one on high humbles himself to raise us up from death. The exalted one lowers himself so that he might exalt the lowly ones.

[32 : 46] So just as we close, remember at the beginning of the service we took a moment to look through the eyes of that Fijian soldier and we imagined what it might be like if the queen lowered herself to look at him eye to eye.

I want to take us to another scene, something that really happens. Remember we spoke about Peter a few times, the one named Rock.

There was a time when he looked at Jesus eye to eye. Jesus, the Lord of heaven was bowed down before him and took on the role of a servant and he washed the feet and he washed the dust off the feet of Peter, cleaning him, claiming him, calling him to be his very own.

You see, this is the God that we worship. This is the God that we praise. And so, how can we finish this?

Praise the Lord. Let us praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. God our Father, we thank you for your grace which is beyond our capacity to grasp the magnitude of your mercy, the unfathomable depths of your love, the humility of your son Jesus.

[34 : 43] Jesus. But what a glorious thing to know that not only have you met us in our mess, saved us from our sin, but that through Jesus, you have lifted us up into new life.

And so, God, we praise you. we praise your holy name. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. you