

PSALM 111

This and divers of the psalms that follow it seem to have been penned by David for the service of the church in their solemn feasts, and not upon any particular occasion. This is a psalm of praise. The title of it is “Hallelujah — Praise you the Lord,” intimating that we must address ourselves to the use of this psalm with hearts disposed to praise God. It is composed alphabetically, each sentence beginning with a several letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in order exactly, two sentences to each verse, and three a piece to the last two. The psalmist, exhorting to praise God,

- I.** Sets himself for an example (v. 1).
- II.** Furnishes us with matter for praise from the works of God.
 - 1.** The greatness of his works and the glory of them.
 - 2.** The righteousness of them.
 - 3.** The goodness of them.
 - 4.** The power of them.
 - 5.** The conformity of them to his word of promise.
 - 6.** The perpetuity of them. These observations are intermixed (v. 2-9).
- III.** He recommends the holy fear of God, and conscientious obedience to his commands, as the most acceptable way of praising God (v. 10).

PSALM 111:1-5

THE EXCELLENCE OF DIVINE WORKS

The title of the psalm being *Hallelujah*, the psalmist (as every author ought to have) has an eye to his title, and keeps to his text.

I. He resolves to praise God himself, v. 1. What duty we call others to we must oblige and excite ourselves to; nay, whatever others do, whether they will praise God or no, we and our houses must determine to do it, we and our hearts; for such is the psalmist's resolution here: *I will praise the Lord*

with my whole heart. My heart, my whole heart, being devoted to his honour, shall be employed in this work; and this *in the assembly*, or secret, *of the upright*, in the cabinet-council, *and in the congregation* of Israelites. Note, We must praise God both in private and in public, in less and greater assemblies, in our own families and in the courts of the Lord's house; but in both it is most comfortable to do it in concert with the upright, who will heartily join in it. Private meetings for devotion should be kept up as well as more public and promiscuous assemblies.

II. He recommends to us the *works of the Lord* as the proper subject of our meditations when we are praising him — the dispensations of his providence towards the world, towards the church, and towards particular persons.

1. God's works are very magnificent, great like himself; there is nothing in them that is mean or trifling: they are the products of infinite wisdom and power, and we must say this upon the first view of them, before we come to enquire more particularly into them, that the *works of the Lord are great*, v. 2. There is something in them surprising, and that strikes an awe upon us. All the *works of the Lord* are spoken of as one (v. 3); it is *his work*, such is the beauty and harmony of Providence and so admirably do all its dispensations centre in one design; it was cried to *the wheels, O wheel!* ^{411B}Ezekiel 10:13. Take all together, and it is *honourable and glorious*, and such as becomes him.

2. They are entertaining and exercising to the inquisitive — *sought out of all those that have pleasure therein.* Note,

(1.) All that truly love God have pleasure in his works, and reckon all well that he does; nor do their thoughts dwell upon any subject with more delight than on the works of God, which the more they are looked into the more they give us of a pleasing surprise.

(2.) Those that have pleasure in the works of God will not take up with a superficial transient view of them, but will diligently search into them and observe them. In studying both natural and political history we should have this in our eye, to discover the greatness and glory of God's works.

(3.) These works of God, that are humbly and diligently sought into, shall be *sought out*; those that *seek shall find* (so some read); *they are found of all those that have pleasure in them*, or found in all their parts, designs,

purposes, and several concernments (so Dr. Hammond), for the *secret of the Lord is with those that fear him*, ^{<1254>}Psalm 25:14.

3. They are all justly and holy; *His righteousness endures for ever*.

Whatever he does, he never did, nor ever will do, any wrong to any of his creatures; and *therefore his works endure for ever* (^{<2084>}Ecclesiastes 3:14) because the righteousness of them endures.

4. They are admirable and memorable, fit to be registered and kept on record. Much that we do is so trifling that it is not fit to be spoken of or told again; the greatest kindness is to forget it. But notice is to be taken of God's works, and an account to be kept of them (v. 4). *He has made his wonderful works to be remembered*; he has done that which is worthy to be remembered, which cannot but be remembered, and he has instituted ways and means for the keeping of some of them in remembrance, as the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt by the passover. *He has made himself a memorial by his wonderful works* (so some read it); see ^{<2330>}Isaiah 63:10. By that which God did with his *glorious arm he made himself an everlasting name*.

5. They are very kind. In them the Lord shows that he is *gracious and full of compassion*. As of the works of creation, so of the works of providence, we must say, They are not only all very great, but all very good. Dr. Hammond takes this to be the name which God has made to himself by his wonderful works, the same with that which he proclaimed to Moses, *The Lord God is gracious and merciful*, ^{<0246>}Exodus 24:6. God's pardoning sin is the most wonderful of all his works and which ought to be remembered to his glory. It is a further instance of his grace and compassion that *he has given meat to those that fear him*, v. 5. He gives them their daily bread, food convenient for them; so he does to others by common providence, but to those that fear him he gives it by covenant and in pursuance of the promise, for it follows, *He will be ever mindful of his covenant*; so that they can taste covenant-love even in common mercies. Some refer this to the manna with which God fed his people Israel in the wilderness, others to the spoil they got from the Egyptians when they came out with great substance, according to the promise, ^{<0154>}Genesis 15:14. When God *broke the heads of leviathan* he gave him to be *meat to his people*, ^{<0744>}Psalm 74:14. *He has given prey to those that fear him* (so the margin has it), not only fed them, but enriched them, and given their enemies to be a prey to them.

6. They are earnest of what he will do, according to his promise: *He will ever be mindful of his covenant*, for he has ever been so; and, as he never did, so he never will, let one jot or tittle of it fall to the ground. Though God's people have their infirmities, and are often unmindful of his commands, yet he *will ever be mindful of his covenant*.

PSALM 111:6-10

THE HAPPINESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

We are here taught to give glory to God,

I. For the great things he has done for his people, for his people Israel, of old and of late: *He has shown his people the power of his works* (v. 6), in what he has wrought for them; many a time he has given proofs of his omnipotence, and shown them what he can do, and that there is nothing too hard for him to do. Two things are specified to show *the power of his works*: —

1. The possession God gave to Israel in the land of Canaan, *that he might give them*, or in giving them, *the heritage of the heathen*. This he did in Joshua's time, when the seven nations were subdued, and in David's time, when the neighbouring nations were many of them brought into subjection to Israel and became tributaries to David. Herein God showed his sovereignty, in disposing of kingdoms as he pleases, and his might, in making good his disposals. If God will make the heritage of the heathen to be the heritage of Israel, who can either arraign his counsel or stay his hand?

2. The many deliverances which he wrought for his people when by their iniquities they had sold themselves into the hand of their enemies (v. 9): *He sent redemption unto his people*, not only out of Egypt at first, but often afterwards; and these redemptions were typical of the great redemption which in the fulness of time was to be wrought out by the Lord Jesus, that redemption in Jerusalem which so many waited for.

II. For the stability both of his word and of his works, which assure us of the great things he will do for them.

1. What God has done shall never be undone. He will not undo it himself, and men and devils cannot (v. 7): *The works of his hand are verity and judgment* (v. 8), that is, they are done in truth and uprightness; all he does is consonant to the eternal rules and reasons of equity, all according to the counsel of his wisdom and the purpose of his will, all well done and therefore there is nothing to be altered or amended, but his works are firm and unchangeable. Upon the beginning of his works we may depend for the perfecting of them; work that is done properly will last, will neither go to decay nor sink under the stress that is laid upon it.

2. What God has said shall never be unsaid: *All his commandments are sure*, all straight and therefore all steady. His purposes, the rule of his actions, shall all have their accomplishment: *Has he spoken, and will he not make it good?* No doubt he will; whether he commands light or darkness, it is done as he commands. His precepts, the rule of our actions, are unquestionably just and good, and therefore unchangeable and not to be repealed; his promises and threatenings are all sure, and will be made good; nor shall the unbelief of man make either the one or the other of no effect. They are established, and therefore *they stand fast for ever and ever*, and the scripture cannot be broken. The wise God is never put upon new counsels, nor obliged to take new measures, either in his laws or in his providences. All is said, as all is done, in truth and uprightness, and therefore it is immutable. Men's folly and falsehood make them *unstable in all their ways*, but infinite wisdom and truth for ever exclude retraction and revocation: *He has commanded his covenant for ever*. God's covenant is commanded, for he has made it as one that has an incontestable authority to prescribe both what we must do and what we must expect, and an unquestionable ability to perform both what he has promised in the blessings of the covenant and what he has threatened in the curses of it, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 105:8.

III. For the setting up and establishing of religion among men. Because *holy and reverend is his name, and the fear of him is the beginning of wisdom*, therefore *his praise endureth for ever*, that is, he is to be everlastingly praised.

1. Because the discoveries of religion tend so much to his honour. Review what he has made known of himself in his word and in his works, and you will see, and say, that God is great and greatly to be feared; for his name is holy, his infinite purity and rectitude appear in all that whereby he has

made himself known, and because it is holy therefore it is reverend, and to be thought of and mentioned with a holy awe. Note, What is holy is reverend; the angels have an eye to God's holiness when they cover their faces before him, and nothing is more man's honour than his sanctification. It is in his holy places that God appears most terrible, ^{<1685>}Psalm 68:35; ^{<1700>}Leviticus 10:3.

2. Because the dictates of religion tend so much to man's happiness. We have reason to praise God that the matter is so well contrived that our reverence of him and obedience to him are as much our interest as they are our duty.

(1.) Our reverence of him is so: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* It is not only reasonable that we should fear God, because his name is reverend and his nature is holy, but it is advantageous to us. It is wisdom; it will direct us to speak and act as becomes us, in a consistency with ourselves, and for our own benefit. It is the head of wisdom, that is (as we read it), it is *the beginning of wisdom.* Men can never begin to be wise till they begin to fear God; all true wisdom takes its rise from true religion, and has its foundation in it. Or, as some understand it, it is the chief wisdom, and the most excellent, the first in dignity. It is the principal wisdom, and the principal of wisdom, to worship God and give honour to him as our Father and Master. Those manage well who always act under the government of his holy fear.

(2.) Our obedience to him is so: *A good understanding have all those that do his commandments.* Where the fear of the Lord rules in the heart there will be a constant conscientious care to keep his commandments, not to talk of them, but to do them; and such have a good understanding, that is,

[1.] They are well understood; their obedience is graciously accepted as a plain indication of their mind that they do indeed fear God. Compare ^{<1700>}Proverbs 3:4, *So shalt thou find favour and good understanding.* God and man will look upon those as meaning well, and approve of them, who make conscience of their duty, though they have their mistakes. What is honestly intended shall be well taken.

[2.] They understand well. *First,* It is a sign that they do understand well. The most obedient are accepted as the most intelligent; those understand themselves and their interest best that make God's law their rule and are in every thing ruled by it. A great understanding those have that know God's

commandments and can discourse learnedly of them, but a good understanding have those that do them and walk according to them. *Secondly*, It is the way to understand better: *A good understanding are they to all that do them*; the fear of the Lord and the laws of that give men a good understanding, and are able to make them *wise unto salvation*. *If any man will do his will, he shall know more and more clearly of the doctrine of Christ*, ^{<B17>}John 7:17. *Good success have all those that do them* (so the margin), according to what was promised to Joshua if he would observe to do according to the law. ^{<B18>}Joshua 1:8, *Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous and shalt have good success*. We have reason to praise God, to praise him for ever, for putting man into such a fair way to happiness. Some apply the last words rather to the good man who fears the Lord than to the good God: *His praise endures for ever*. It is *not of men* perhaps, *but it is of God* (^{<B29>}Romans 2:29), and that praise which is of God endures for ever when the praise of men is withered and gone.