

Exalting The Holy One

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- [0 : 0 0] We're in Psalm 99 today. We've almost done 100 psalms.
100 weeks. Did you start with Psalm 1? Yeah. So you've done it for like 3 years. Yeah. Nice.
Wow. That's cute. Psalm 99. Psalm 99 doesn't have a superscription.
It doesn't have like an explanatory title. Nine short verses. I'll read it out loud first. Get started. The Lord reigns.
Let the peoples tremble. He sits enthroned upon the cherubim. Let the earth quake. The Lord is great in Zion. He is exalted over all the peoples.
- [0 : 5 9] Let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he. The king in his might loves justice. You have established equity.
You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. Exalt the Lord our God. Worship at his footstool. Holy is he. Moses and Aaron were among his priests.
Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the Lord and he answered them. In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them. They kept his testimonies and the statute that he gave them.
O Lord our God, you answered them. You were a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain.
For the Lord our God is holy. In the early 19th century Christian philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, he said that God is qualitatively, not just quantitatively different from us.
- [2 : 1 0] By that he means that the difference between God is not one of degree, that God's not just a perfect or a better kind of humanity, but that he is something totally different.
That he is other. And another theologian, a Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, says he is, God is holy other. H-W-H-O-L-N-Y, holy other. He is separate from us.
He's set apart from us. He's unlike us. That's what that's referring to. And that's really the basic meaning of the word holy, which is repeated four times in this psalm. Twice it says, holy is he.
Holy is he. So even though we normally contrast the word holy to something that is sinful, or, you know, the actual biblical contrast is to contrast what is holy from what is common.
So Leviticus 10.10 says, you are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean. So the fact that God is holy in this sense is not something that obviously we talk about very much, or in our culture, we don't appreciate that fact very much.
- [3 : 1 5] Because we like to, I think, bring God down to our level, make him seem a little more accessible, make him feel, seem more relatable. I think we like to bring God down to our level for that reason.
And, but because of that, I think people also tend to not practice submission and humility before God, but rather they bargain with God. And the way we live, and the way we talk to him, and we pray, we like to get concessions from him instead of submitting to him totally.

And I think doing this, even though it's well intended, has the unintended consequence of making scripture less relatable to us. Because the God that scripture portrays is a holy God. And thinking about God in this way and bringing God down to our level makes God seem foreign to us.

And so Psalm 99 is really a good corrective to that. It helps us to, it teaches us that we should exalt the holy God who forgives yet avenges wrongdoers.

So exalt, lift up, we should lift him up instead of bringing him down to our level. And so in first five verses it talks about God's awesomeness. And then in six to nine it talks about God's answer.

[4 : 24] These are the reasons why we should exalt him, his awesomeness and the way he answers us. And so verses one to five speak of God's awesomeness. And nowadays, right, we say all kinds of pedestrian, ordinary things are awesome, right?

So it's kind of, the word has kind of lost its force. But really, the awesome in its original sense, awe-inspiring, like producing fear, reverence, awe in us.

God's awesome in that way, as it says. And verse one says, the Lord reigns. And we're in Psalm 99. And let the peoples tremble. He sits enthroned upon the cherubim.

Let the earth quake. The two clauses are parallel in verse one. So it's the Lord reigns and he sits enthroned upon the cherubim are parallel, right? So cherubim is just a plural word for the word cherub, right?

And it's an angel. It's a celestial being. And so this powerful angelic beings that inspire awe in us, like their wings, is like God's throne.

[5 : 30] Or like, I don't know. When I think of throne, I think of like the toilet, right? It's like, but it's like the, his, it's what he sits on, right? These mighty beings, they form their angels. And that's what God sits on.

That's how great God is. And when you're in his presence, it makes us tremble, it says, right? And then parallel to that, right? The word peoples refers to all the peoples of the earth, people groups.

And then also it makes the earth quake, right? And this is, we don't like to think about it, because we don't really often think about when we go to God's presence, it makes us tremble, right?

It fills us with fear and awe. But that's what happens over and over again throughout scripture. It's kind of like, I mean, in much lesser degree, when a girl goes into the office in school to meet with the principal, right?

She trembles, right? Or when an employee walks into the office to meet with his CEO for the first time, right? He trembles. Or when a citizen meets her president, right?

[6 : 28] He trembles, right? Maybe not literally, but nervous, right? Butterflies, right? You tremble. There's a sense of reverence and awe.

And I think it's because as people, we don't do enough trembling before God that we do a lot of worrying and trembling in our own lives.

And I think it's because we don't do enough trembling before God, we do so much fretting before men. We're afraid because we don't quite grasp how powerful God is. We worry because we don't quite grasp how fully in control God is, right?

And we worry because we don't quite fully grasp how in control he is. By failing properly to exalt the holy God, we elevate and magnify our own problems, our own lives.

And I think that's a consequence of us not trembling as we should before God's presence. Verses 2 to 3 tell us further that the Lord is great in Zion, which is another name for Jerusalem, the city of God.

[7 : 33] But God's not confined to that locality. In fact, verse 2 continues, he's exalted over all the peoples. Jerusalem is his chosen dwelling place, but his rule is over all the peoples.

And therefore, verse 3 says, let them praise your great and awesome name. Holy is he. God reigns over all, so all people should praise him. And that's also such a kind of countercultural idea, right?

Because we like to, it's ever since the Enlightenment, people tend to separate, like, kind of relegate religious views and faith and beliefs to kind of a real private opinion, right?

Well, that's a matter of private opinion, personal choice. Don't let anyone tell anyone else what they should believe. You should have your own belief, right? But biblically speaking, that's not the case.

It's religious truth. Spiritual realities are not matters of personal opinion. They're matters of truth. They're public truths. And therefore, in here, it's because God is God over all peoples.

[8 : 34] He's saying that all of them should praise him. That's the reality. That's the truth. And so he did this, I think, who was it? At the U.S. Center, I wrote it down.

Daniel Moynihan. I've never heard of him, but apparently he's the one that said this popular thing that people quote all the time. Everyone is entitled to their own opinions, but they are not entitled to their own facts, right?

And the fact is that God is real, and the fact is that God rules over all, and for that reason, we ought to exalt him, and every people should worship him.

That's the reality that this psalm is proclaiming. So then we should ask ourselves, do we think of our faith in God as a private affair, personal thing to keep to ourselves, or do we see this as something that we should share and invite the whole world to participate in?

And it's not like we're breaking some bad news, right? I mean, we're sharing good news, right? We're telling people something that they should rejoice in is good. Verse 4 says this, The king in his might loves justice.

[9 : 36] You have established equity. You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. This is a comforting truth, right? Because a king who is mighty can do all kinds of things. A king who is mighty can become a tyrant.

He could do all kinds of bad things. But here it says, The king in his might loves justice. He doesn't love money. He doesn't love cruelty. He doesn't love power.

He loves justice. And he has established equity, executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. And so when his rule is enforced over the earth, and when his kingdom is established, then there should be rejoicing and submission to him.

So then if that's the case, why wouldn't we want to tell the world about his reign? Why wouldn't we want to bring the world under the influence of the kingdom of God and submission to him? And that's why verse 5 concludes the first section of this psalm with the refrain.

Exalt the Lord our God. Worship at his footstool. Holy is he. To approach God as our equal, to take him for granted, to treat him like our lackey, or this little genie in the bottle, is to demean him and to lower him.

[10 : 45] But this psalm tells us we should instead lift him up. We should exalt the holy God and worship at his footstool. So that's God's awesomeness. And then second part, the second reason for exalting God is his answer, the way he answers us.

Verses 6 to 9. Verses 6 to 7 recount how in the past God answered his people. It says, Moses and Aaron were among his priests. Samuel also was among those who called upon his name.

They called to the Lord and he answered them. In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them. They kept his testimonies and the statute. That he gave them. Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were all in different parts of Israel's history.

People who interceded on behalf of God's people. Who stood before God and for Israel. And in Exodus 32 to 34, for example, when the people of Israel made the golden calf and worshipped the calf in the wilderness, in Moses' absence, Moses came back and he executed God's judgment by putting to the sword some of the people, some of the idolaters.

But he also intervened on behalf of the rest of God's people to avert God's wrath. And he says in Exodus 32, 30 to 34. The next day Moses said to the people, you have sinned a great sin and now I will go up to the Lord.

[12 : 05] Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin. So Moses returned to the Lord and said, Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now if you will forgive their sin, but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.

But the Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. But now go, lead the people to the place about which I've spoken to you. Behold, my angel shall go before you.

Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. That's a wonderful picture of what it means to be an intercessor. Moses stands between the people who are facing God's judgment and before God and says, God, if you're going to blot them out, rather have blot me out from the book of life instead, from here to from here, blot me out and take these people to the promised land.

And God doesn't take him up on that offer. Moses should be grateful for that. But next is number 16. We see an example of Aaron doing the similar thing.

So they grumble against Moses and Aaron. First, this is after Korah's rebellion. They try to rebel against Moses and his leadership. And afterward, God strikes Korah and his faction down.

[13 : 22] But afterward, they're still grumbling and complaining to Moses and Aaron. So that plague breaks out with God's wrath within the camp. And then it says that Aaron took his priestly censer and the fire from the altar of the tabernacle to carry it quickly to the congregation to make atonement for them.

Same word that was used in Exodus 32. Number 16.48 says that Aaron stood between the dead and the living and the plague was stopped. Again, that's a picture of him interceding.

That's why his name is mentioned here. Samuel does the same thing. When Israel seeks a king, rejects the theocracy and seeks a monarchy instead of wanting God as their king. Once a human king in 1 Samuel 12, Samuel intercedes on their behalf and they ask him to pray for him so that they wouldn't die.

And then Samuel says to them, Ask for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. So Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were all intercessors that stood between God and man and they were successful in their own way, in their own time.

And so verse 8 says, it remembers that. It says, O Lord our God, you answer them. You are a forgiving God to them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings. This kind of seemingly contradictory, these attributes of God, right?

[14 : 39] He is both forgiving and avenging. That comes from Exodus 34, right? But how can God simultaneously be forgiving and avenging?

Because throughout the Old Testament, some people seem to get what they deserve, but then there are these other people that don't seem to get what they deserve. God's people are repeatedly unfaithful to him, but God repeatedly shows them mercy and spares them and keeps his step-by-step love and covenant with them.

Again and again, he forgives them. So that's a violation of God's character. Because verse 4 said earlier that the king in his might loves justice.

You have established equity. You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob, but to let the guilty go and to not punish them is not loving justice. That's the subversion of God's justice and righteousness.

And so then, how can God do this and still rule with equity? And that's arguably, and as Paul points out, one of the probably most important theological questions that runs through the Old Testament.

[15 : 42] And it doesn't find a satisfactory answer until Christ comes to show how God can be both forgiving and avenging. Romans 3, 21-26 explains it this way, But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

You guys follow his logic there, right? In divine forbearance, God had passed over former sins, thus calling into question God's justice, calling into question God's righteousness.

But God vindicated himself and displayed his righteousness by offering Jesus as the atoning sacrifice. So Jesus, God's son, paid the penalty for our sins and absorbed the wrath of God directly toward us so that we who repent of our sins and believe in Jesus Christ can experience God as the forgiving God instead of the avenging God.

[17 : 08] That's how God can be both forgiving and avenging. And that's the good news that Psalm 99 ultimately points to because, yes, Moses, Aaron, and Samuel interceded on God's behalf, but they're all dead now, right?

And they can't really help us now. And God couldn't take Moses' life and punish him for his people's sins because he was not worthy for that task.

But Jesus is worthy of that task. He stands between the living and the dead. He stands between us, our sinful people, and between God. And he pays the penalty for our sin.

And so Hebrews 7, 23, 25 speaks of the fact that now even though many priests, they died and they passed away, they couldn't continue their office and ministry. But he says, Jesus holds his priesthood permanently because he continues forever.

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.

[18 : 17] Right now, in God's heavenly court, at the right hand of the Father, Jesus is making intercession for us. We would not pass that court, we would not pass that judgment, but he is making intercession for us right now and for eternity.

Jesus is doing that for us and he will never fail in that task because he lives forever. Because he was raised from the dead. He defeated sin and death. And that's all the more reason we should exalt the Lord as verse 9 concludes.

Exalt the Lord, our God, and worship at his holy mountain for the Lord, our God, is holy. God bless you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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