**Our majestic and merciful God** 7/9/24 dkm pm, md

Read: 1Samuel 2:1-11, Philippians 2:1-18

Text: Psalm 113

Psalms: 113, 50:1-11, 115:1-9, 131

What’s in a name? My name is Dennis, which I am told is from the Greek, Dionysius, meaning ‘son of Zeus’. Wow! I am sure my parents did not know this when they named me! We name babies according to the sound of the name and often after some association with this name. We rarely consider the meaning. Although I was in a discussion about the name Mohammed, and whether a convert should keep this name. When we hear this name we think ‘Muslim’, and then make further associations.

If you heard my name without meeting me you wouldn’t know much about me- unless you asked people who know me. In ancient times the meaning of a name was significant. What does Moses mean? Joshua means, ‘God saves’; the Greek equivalent is Jesus. We know a lot about Jesus from what people who knew him have written. But how do we know about God. This psalm tells us to praise the name of the Lord, the Lord our God. We will look at the meaning of the name Lord, as we find it in this psalm.

Wonderfully, we know much more about God since Jesus, God’s Son, ‘explained him’ or made him known (John 1:18). Moses and David did not have this ‘explanation’ of God but still they knew their God to be different to the gods of other nations. Human beings by nature worship a god. Since Adam and Eve were cut off from God’s presence because of sin, men have made other gods to worship, gods of their own imagination. Sometimes these gods are carved images, and sometimes man sees himself as a god.

How then is the God of Moses and David different to the gods of other nations? The psalmist says that the Lord our God cannot even be compared to other gods: ‘Who is like our God?’ he asks in a rhetorical question (113:5). Psalm 115 continues this theme, mocking idols that cannot see, hear, smell or walk. Man can do such things, of course, because he is made in the image of God, but truth about God revealed in this psalm goes way beyond any comparison to man as a god.

Psalm 113 is the first of six so-called Hallel psalms, or Egyptian Hallel psalms, because they relate to the Exodus from Egypt (Ps 114:1). ‘Hallel’ comes from the Hebrew ‘Hallelujah’ meaning ‘Praise’. These psalms were sung at Jewish feasts, like Passover, the first two before the Passover meal and the other four after the meal. The hymns sung at the Last Supper by Jesus and his disciples would have been one of these psalms (Mk 14:26). This psalm is one of praise, beginning and ending with the words, ‘Praise the Lord!’. It is a psalm of only nine verses in three stanzas, which we will take under three subheadings: ‘God worthy of all praise’, ‘God transcendent yet near to us’, and ‘God of merciful deliverance’.

**1.God worthy of all praise**

In this psalm God is referred to as the Lord or the Lord our God. The title ‘God’ is not specific unless we use a capital G. The Bible also speaks of God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, Moses asked for a name he could tell to Pharoah. God said to Moses, ‘I AM who I AM’, which is YAHWEH in Hebrew, and which is translated LORD in our Bible. Hence the name the Lord our God. Yahweh is the covenant name of God. God makes a covenant with his people. There was the old or Mosaic covenant, and nowadays a new covenant in Jesus Christ- the same Lord our God in both covenants.

The terms of the covenant, as given by God, are, ‘I will be your God, and you will be my people’. God promised to deliver his chosen people and dwell among them, providing for them and protecting them for all generations. Covenant people are required to obey God’s commands and worship him exclusively; he is a jealous God. So, in response to who God is and what he done by way of deliverance, God’s people are to worship and praise him as he commands.

God has given us a name by which he is to be praised so we use this name. The name Yahweh, ‘I AM who I AM’, tells us firstly, that God is a person, not some abstract reason or force. God is a spirit of course, but a personal and knowable spirit. There are three persons in the Godhead; we refer to each by the personal pronoun ‘He’. Secondly, God is self-existent, without beginning and without end. He is knowable to the extent that he has revealed himself. He has done this in his creation and in his words and ‘living word’, Jesus Christ our Lord. We must not start worshipping what he has created, or what we imagine God to be.

Thirdly, God is self-sufficient. ‘He owns the cattle on a thousand hills’ (Ps 50:10), and does not need anything from us, apart from praise, praise from humble and obedient hearts. He does not even need praise, but he has made us for this purpose. In this psalm we are called ‘servants’ of the Lord, and are called to praise his holy name, not once, not twice, not three times but four times in the first three verses.

Fourthly, the Lord is unchanging, the same yesterday, today and for ever. This is a great comfort as we live in a changing world and even as our circumstances in life change; God does not change. God is like a rock that we can stand on every day of our lives. Moreover, he is sovereign over everything in this world, over his creation and over all nations (113:4). As the sovereign, all-knowing and all-powerful God there is no escaping him. Every human being will have to give account to him. ‘From the rising of the sun to its going down’, that is, in all the earth, ‘the Lord’s name is to be praised’ (113:3). These words are taken up by Malachi in his rebuke of Isarel for their dishonouring worship. The prophet speaks of God’s name being great among the Gentiles and among the nations (Mal 1:11).

**2.God of transcendent glory yet near to us**

As we continue praising the Lord our God, we continue to remember that there is no other like him (113:5). After asking, ‘Who is God?’ or ‘What is God like?’ we ask, ‘Where is God?’. ‘The Lord is high above the heavens’ (113:4). God is from everlasting to everlasting and he rules over all the earth or all the nations. He is the God of creation, and he continues to rule over his creation. When man attributes the creation to another god, or some other ‘scientific’ cause, he is not worshipping the true God. The creation reveals the power and majesty of God, but he is not in his creation.

God transcends his creation. He looks down on the earth and even the heavens. God is above and beyond all that exists. He is enthroned high above the heavens. He is the Most High God in terms of his dwelling place and in terms of his sovereign rule. Recall the proud and arrogant men building the tower of Babel. Eve wanted to be like God, and these men wanted to build a tower to make a name for themselves. And so it continues today, with men and women wanting to make a name for themselves here on earth. We, as the servants of the Lord, should be making the name of the Lord known in all the earth and praising his holy name.

Yet this transcendent, sovereign God humbles himself or stoops down to look on his reaction, especially on human beings whom he made in his own image to worship him (113:6). Gods made in the image of man do not humble themselves to look on the poor and needy of this world. The gods of Hinduism say the poor are poor because of karma and nothing can be done to help them. The god of evolution proclaims the survival of the fittest in this world. Only the Lord our God humbles himself to look upon us in our need. He heard the cry of his people in Egypt and sent his servant Moses to deliver them, to bring them out of bondage and into a place of freedom. We see the Lord our God humbling himself and coming down to deliver us from bondage to sin in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Such was his humiliation that he took on the form of a man, the likeness of sinful flesh, to suffer and even die in this world of chaos, corruption and death (Phil 2:7).

**3.God of merciful deliverance**

From his throne on high, above the heavens, the Lord our God looks down and acts with love and mercy to deliver the poorest of the poor, the lowest of the low, in this world. This is humility, this is condescension, this is love, this is the God that we worship. The words of verse 7 are the same as those prayed by Hannah in 1Samuel 2:8. Hannah was a godly but childless woman. She prayed earnestly, even vowing to give the child to the Lord. When Samuel was born she fulfilled her vow with this humble prayer. She expressed the same truths as found in this psalm. ‘No one is holy like the Lord, for there is none besides you… even the barren has born seven’, and these words, ‘He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes’ (1Sam 2:2,5,8).

Mary the mother of Jesus Christ expressed the same thoughts in the Song of Mary in Luke 1. The Lord our God is mighty and merciful, mighty to bring down those who exalt themselves against him, and merciful to exalt or lift up the down-trodden and downcast, as in women like Hannah and Mary, not to mention Naomi and Sarah, Abraham’s wife. Sinful men and especially sinful rulers readily tread down the poor and the weak, widows and orphans. Look at the Middle East today; neither the leaders of Israel or of Palestine care about such people.

But the Lord our God cares about the poor and needy. Such souls that are precious to him, and he gives them hope. In the nations of this world the poor and needy are neglected, but not in the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, the King will overturn the laws of men by which the poor and needy are exploited and oppressed by the rich and powerful. The Lord will lift the poor out of the dust and the needy out of the ash heap and seat them with princes (113:7,8).

In the context of the Exodus, the oppressed servants of the Lord were delivered from slavery and given their own plot of land or inheritance in Canaan. The Lord our God continues to show mercy towards the poor and needy who call upon his name. But the Lord’s mercy extends beyond the physical to the spiritual. The Exodus was remembered every year in the Passover, but it also pointed forward to a greater deliverance, deliverance from sin and death. The Passover is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the deliverance or redemption we have in his precious blood.

The kingdom of God that Jesus inaugurated is only for people who are ‘poor in spirit’, people who recognise their need of deliverance and cry to the Lord for mercy. The Lord our God will raise you up to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus when you confess your sin and believe in him (Eph 2:6). It is not surprising that people who are poor and needy more readily respond to the gospel of grace. Jesus called little children to himself and blessed them. If you feel forgotten or rejected by his world, be assured you are not forgotten by the Lord our God.

The closing verse of this psalm refers to the barren or childless women becoming a joyful mother of children. The Bible abounds in stories of barren women becoming pregnant and having children -note Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Hannah and then Elizabeth. A Hebrew wife without children felt great shame. Without children she would face a bleak future, especially if she became a widow, like Naomi. Some women today put career before having children. Many want both but find that when they have established their career and want children, they are too old. They have been told they can have children whenever they want but find this is not true. We all have a limited life span and a so-called biological clock that is set by God. The wise will consider this ‘clock’ and remember that it is the Lord not science who blesses us with children (Ps 127:3).

Women who are blessed with children, especially that who wait a long time for the Lord to answer their prayer, will be especially thankful to God and be praising him with the psalmist. They, along with the poor and needy who cried to him and were delivered, will be early to the house of God. The rich and famous are also welcome at the house of God but they must come humbly before the sovereign God confessing their sin and their need of salvation. It is hard but not impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God; with God all things are possible (Luke 18:27).