

Incomparable compassion

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to the psalm we read, Psalm 113, and our text is verses 5 to 8. Psalm 113 and verses 5 to 8.

Let us read from the beginning again. Praise ye the Lord. Praise, O ye servants of the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore, from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.

The Lord's name is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Then these words, Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?

He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.

Verses 5 to 8 of Psalm 113. Now when we come to any of these psalms in this particular group, 113 to 118, we ought to remind ourselves that our blessed Lord would have sung them at the Passover time, and no doubt at other times too.

[1 : 21] This group of psalms, 113 to 118, is known as the Hallel. They consist of the Hallelujah Psalms. The Hallel means Hallelujah, and they are the Hallelujah Psalms.

Psalms full of praise and adoration. Now, churches that do not sing many psalms, or perhaps do not sing any psalms, very often think of the psalms as dirges, sad, melancholy, lifeless.

Indeed, the only lifeless thing about the psalms is very often the singing of them. But in themselves, far from being dirges, there are psalms that are full of hallelujahs, of praises to the Lord.

And this is one of them. This is the opening psalm of the Hallel, and this is no exception. Indeed, there is more room given to praise here than to the other psalms in this group.

Almost, in almost every verse, there is praise. And our text is no exception. The psalmist says, Who is like unto the Lord our God?

[2 : 32] There is no one like him. He is all alone in his gloriousness and in his graciousness. So that from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, for that very reason, his name is to be praised.

For what very reason are we to praise the name of the Most High? Well, we are given two reasons here in our text for hallelujah, for praising the name of the Most High.

First of all, because of his character in verses 5 and 6. And then because of his activity, his redeeming activity in verses 7 and 8.

So I would like us now to notice, first of all, the character of our Redeemer. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwells on high, who humbles himself to behold things in heaven and in the earth.

Now in these two verses we have something written about the character of our Redeemer. And this is introduced in words similar to those we read in Isaiah chapter 40.

[3 : 47] To whom then will you liken God? Says Isaiah the prophet. And who is like unto the Lord our God? Says David the psalmist.

Well, who indeed? Who is like unto the Lord our God? Who indeed is like unto the Lord our God? And this is all the truth when we examine the two views of his character that are brought before us and are displayed here in these verses.

And the two parts of God's character as our Saviour and Redeemer and Deliverer are these. We notice first, his greatness. And in the same being of God, there is also his lowliness.

Who is like unto the Lord our God? For his sheer majesty. For he dwells on high. And who is like unto the Lord our God?

For his true lowliness and condescension. For he humbles himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth.

[4 : 54] There you have the two aspects of God's character in these two verses. His greatness, his majesty, his magnificence as our Redeemer. And also his humility and condescension and lowliness.

Let us think of these two aspects then tonight. In this first part of our text. The character of our Redeemer. First then we notice his enthroned greatness.

He dwells on high. He is the high and the lofty one who inhabits eternity. His deity is enthroned deity.

For he is the Lord of heaven. The blessed and the only potentate King of kings and Lord of lords. Heaven is his throne. One minister a long time ago preaching to the members of the House of Commons which would be nice to see done today and preaching from this very psalm said this among many other things.

He said Although heaven is God's throne yet he is not so confined to that place as to be excluded from other places for the heaven of heavens cannot contain him.

[6 : 14] But yet, says this preacher, yet in heaven he chiefly magnifies his glory and his goodness. He dwells on high.

His greatness is enthroned greatness. He has the greatness of a king. And because he is in heaven he is above the rule of men.

For those who do rule rule by his authority. By him kings rule and by him princes decree justice. And because he is in heaven and heaven is his throne he is not only the king of kings and the one who gives power for men to rule but he is also king of nations.

You see what verse 4 says the Lord is high above all nations. And the same fourth verse tells us that he is not only high above all nations but he is high above the realm of created things.

His glory is above the heavens above the starry heavens. So that the sun and the moon and the stars and angels too are under his feet.

[7 : 31] And he is also above duration for he is above and beyond time because he is the infinite God. Before the mountains were brought forth wherever thou art formed the earth or the world even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

He is above all time and beyond time. And one bishop by the name of Wilberforce said this time reaches not to the steps of the eternal throne.

For the throne is eternal and time does not touch its steps. So then here is our Redeemer. Here is this particular and most important facet of our Redeemer's character.

His superlative greatness and his majesty. He is Lord of all being thrown afar whose glory flames from sun and star center and soul of every sphere yet to each loving heart draws near says Oliver Wendell Holmes.

How true that is. But my dear friends it's in our Lord Jesus that we see the Godhead. It's in the Lord Jesus we see the Godhead and the majesty of our Redeemer.

[9 : 00] For in him the Lord Jesus dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form. It pleased the Father that in him the Lord Jesus should all fullness dwell.

and this is the Redeemer we are thinking about here and is brought before our minds here. One who is high and lifted up and because he is enthroned in heaven the high and lifted one who dwells on high he cannot look up he cannot look higher than himself.

It would be superfluous for him to look higher for there's nothing above him or beyond him. But for us it's a perennial necessity to look up.

For we look up to one who dwells on high. One of enthroned greatness. That's what verse 5 says.

Now verse 6 says this we notice his revealed lowliness his revealed lowliness who humbles himself to behold things that are in heaven and in the earth.

[10 : 12] he humbles himself to behold literally he casts looks down he casts looks low in other words he stoops and where does this stoop take him as he looks down?

Where does this stoop take him? It takes him first of all to the things which are in heaven that of course is the starry heavens the permanent upon us. In order to look on the heavens that are so far above us the Lord has to stoop to look down for the sun and the moon and the stars are under his feet and he has as it were to stoop to see them.

There's an accommodation of language here obviously. It means that he has to look down to see the highest point of his creation the heavens the sun the moon the stars because heaven is so far above the place of his throne where he dwells on high and even in heaven itself the throne and the enthroned king are above angels and archangels and cherubim and above the spirits of just men made perfect.

There is nothing higher than our enthroned Lord. And here we see the wonder of his condescension that he stoops he casts looks down to see things that are in heaven and even more he stoops to see things that are on earth that's the other thing well he did so with Adam with Enoch with Noah with Abraham with David he looked down for example at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel and he came down at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel but he didn't need to come down in order to look but when he looked and when he saw he came down and he came down again in the fullness of time in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ he cast looks low and he saw the situation on earth and when he saw he stooped low in

Christ so that we have these words great is the mystery of godliness God manifest in flesh what is man that thou art mindful of him or the son of man that thou visitest him oh the great condescension of God brought before us here just just in a very in a very limited form but nevertheless it's there the doctrine of the incarnation developed more fully of course in the new testament but will you notice again how the psalmist puts these two things he says who is like unto the Lord our God now this is not a question he's not asking for an answer he's making a statement he's making a statement about two things about our redeemer's greatness and about our redeemer's lowliness about his majesty and about his humility and what he is saying here in the opening words of verse five is that both his greatness and his humility are unparalleled and they are unchallengeable who is like unto the

[13 : 51] Lord our God who is the psalmist is challenging the entire created universe to produce a being with such greatness on the one hand and with such lowliness on the other and he knows that his challenge cannot be answered who is like unto the Lord our God who dwells on high his exalted greatness who casts looks low his revealed lowliness let us put it this way no one is so great and therefore able to stoop so low no one is so good and therefore willing to stoop so low and no one is so infinite and yet able to enter into and sympathize with our every grief and seize our every tear that's the one who saves us that's the one who keeps us who calls justifies and glorifies he's eminently qualified if for no other reason than these two attributes of his which include many others the greatness of his majesty and dignity and power on the one hand and his lowliness and condescension on the other the character of our redeemer that we come now to these other words in verses 7 and 8 where we notice the nature of our redemption the nature of our redemption he raises up the poor out of the dust he lifts the needy out of the downhill or the ash heap as the modern verses have it that he may set him with princes even with the princes of his people now there you have

I believe the nature of our redemption and these two verses state the history of redemption or rather the history of our own redemption for the history of every christian believer is just this it's from the downhill to the throne that's what these two verses are about that's our history from the lowest to the highest from the commoner to the prince and you see that's what christianity is about it's not just a creed it's not just a set of doctrines however precious the doctrines are it's a journey from sin to grace from the downhill to the throne and from the poorest to the wealthiest that's what it's about and that's why it's so important that we have a hold upon Christ our redeemer for no one else can lift us from the downhill to the throne but the lord jesus so let us notice two things here then in our text first of all notice where god goes in redemption we're talking here about the nature of our redemption notice then where god goes in our redemption where are we when redemption finds us where were we when redemption found us in the dust and in the downhill where does god's love go when he seeks us out well we have the answer of hezekiah who said thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption thou hast loved my soul from the pit of corruption for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back and when god humbles himself to see what's on the earth what does he see he sees us first of all poor and needy that's what the text says he raises up the poor and he lifts up the needy so this is where redemption goes this is where it goes to first of all it comes down to the poor and needy now that's what we are in

God's sight poor and needy and this may well have a social connotation it may well speak of the down and out and the socially deprived but it's by no means these people alone who need saving and who need redeeming and who need redemption every section of modern society to the very top needs redemption and needs saving so when we talk about the poor and needy we are thinking of this rather as a description of those who are spiritually deprived and are spiritually poor and needy and down and out and everyone out of Christ is poor and needy whatever we may think of ourselves that's how we stand in the sight of God and it's by no means a flattering description of us and for many people in the upper classes of society it would be quite intolerable description poor and medium well if

David the psalmist who was so dear to God's own heart could say I poor and medium come Lord and make no stay what about ordinary mortals like ourselves if Paul as a Christian believer had to say oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from this body of death then how great is the sinner's poverty and need so when he comes for us in redemption to seek us in redemption he comes to us as those who are poor and needy and as God seeks us in Christ he not only sees what we are but he then sees where we are and he comes to where we are and where are we the dust and the ash heap that's where redemption goes to the dust he comes down to the dust and to the dunghill down to the dunghill and to the dunghill and to the dunghill and the word of

God is so unflattering and most of all it is so utterly true it hits the nail on the head why do people turn away angry if they are told that they belong to the dust and to the dunghill why are they angry at such a statement as this because they know the cap fits them and they don't like a cap that fits now when God seeks us in the dust what is it he finds death for dust speaks to us of death we return to the dust from whence we came the spirit goes back to God who gave it dust in other words symbolizes sin's penalty we were talking about this morning the sting of sin the bite brings death and dust speaks of sin's penalty and then when God seeks us on the dung hill what does he find degradation for the dung hill speaks of degradation and if the dust symbolizes sin's penalty death then the dung hill symbolizes sin's pollution and corruption so that

[21 : 57] David the psalmist here so long ago is not saying anything new about us for this is the new testament description of man by nature he is under the control of sin's guilt of sin's power of sin's pollution and corruption and sin's penalty for the wages of sin is death and the new testament goes to the very root just as David does it goes to the very root of the matter and shows us without fear and favor where it is we are by nature and what we need to be redeemed from and what we need to be lifted out of from the dust and out of the downhill well that's where God goes in redemption to the poor and needy and to the dust and dust and the next thing is this what God does in redemption what

God does in redemption well our text tells us he does two things and they take place simultaneously two movements two divine movements that go hand in hand he raises up and he sets us among the princes of his people that's what the verse says he raises up the poor out of the dust he lifts the needy out of the dunghill that's the first movement and along with that that he may set him with the princes even with the princes of his people so there's a dual movement here first of all he raises us up now in this verse 7 it becomes clear that God's stooping to behold what is on earth and to behold the things that are on earth didn't end with a look he stooped to look he stooped to behold but more clearly in this verse than in the previous verse we know that he came down in order to raise us up he who was rich for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be rich he became the son of man the son of

Mary that we might be sons of God he took upon him the form of a servant he humbled himself he became obedient unto death why in order that he might raise us among the living in other words our salvation here is in terms of resurrection in terms of resurrection he raises the poor and he lifts up the needy and he raises the poor from sinking sand from the dunghill from the dust from the pit and mighty clay and when he lifts us up it's a dead lift it's a dead lift to lift the dead from the dust of death and no one outside the trinity can do it many people try to lift themselves up by doing this or that by relying on this or that by reforming this or that by not doing this or that have you ever seen someone trying to lift himself up by his shoelaces it looks as and yet there are so many people doing the very same thing in the spiritual realm it's all to no avail he must raise us he must lift us and our resurrection therefore our deliverance our salvation is a mighty lift for as long as we are in the dust as long as we are poor and needy on the dung hill

Paul says this we are yet without strength we are yet without strength we can't remove the grave clothes nor the stone at the door nor step out into newness of life we are yet without strength until he comes and lifts us by his almighty strength oh may he do that for every one of us and may be true of every one of us tonight that he has come and that he has lifted us up by his mighty power by his sovereign call and through the redemption purchased for us by Christ so we can say with David he took me from a fearful pit and from the mighty clay and on a rock he set my feet establishing my way that's the first thing then he raises up that's the first part of the movement it's a resurrection and the second thing is he sets us among the princes of his people he sets us among the princes even the princes of his people now I believe this is true that all believers are princes in the sight of

God they are daughters of the king all glory is with him they have a royal priesthood they are a kingdom of priests they sit at the king's table as Paul says they are raised together and made to sit together in heavenly places they belong to the household of faith God's people in the sight of God whatever we may think of ourselves in the sight of God when he raises us from the dunghill he makes us princes and all who are raised are put among the princes even among the princes of his people so when he raises us up by his mighty power it is in order to put us among the princes of his people to sit us at his table so that we belong to the household of faith well now in practical terms what does this setting among the princes mean for us let me put it this way for one thing when he lifts us and raises us he lifts us into a complete justification we are instantly accepted in the beloved we are instantly given a standing that is unalterable and irreversible and we are princes because of a complete justification and our crown is as sure as it is bright and our throne is as certain as it is lofty he has made us princes set us among the princes given us a crown given us a throne which is sure as sure as our justification itself and then when he lifts us he lifts us not only into a complete justification but he lifts us into a mystical union and as the word suggests it's not an easy thing to understand a mysterious union with himself by faith so that even although we don't understand it we can say my beloved is mine and I am his we are members of his body of his flesh and of his bones and again he lifts us into a living temple we are a living temple in the

[29 : 33] Lord for the moment he raises us he puts his spirit within us and his spirit dwells within us and we have within us the spirit of holiness and we are a holy temple in the Lord and all these things being among the princes of his people and then when he lifts us he lifts us into an assured faith so we can say I know that my redeemer liveth that he shall stand at the latter day upon this earth although after my flesh worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God whom mine eye shall behold and not another though my reins be consumed within me he gives us this assurance so we can say I am persuaded that nothing shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord isn't that to be among the princes and then and then and then also when he lifts us as these verses indicate he lifts us into a new usefulness every useful person in the kingdom of God is of princely rank every useful person every servant of God is of princely rank my dear friends to teach the young to reclaim the fallen to cheer the desponding to strengthen the wavering to give a cup of cold water to a disciple in the name of Christ that is princely work and when he lifts us he lifts us into a life of usefulness puts us among the princes among the princes of his people when he lifts us up we are not as it were shunted into a siding to stagnate for the rest of our lives but he lifts us onto the main line to serve the king of kings and the more usefully we serve him the more princely we are well I think that it's something like that that these words are about he raises up the poor out of the dust he lifts the needy out of the dunghill in order that he may set him may put him with the princes even with the princes of his people well may we know what this is about may we know what in other words may we know what the first resurrection is what is the first resurrection it's got nothing to do with the body the first resurrection is the resurrection of the soul from the grave of sin into newness of life culminating in eternal glory that's the first resurrection it's got to do with the soul and it's this first resurrection he is speaking of here when he speaks of raising the poor and lifting the needy that's the first resurrection may we all know what it is and we will know what it is when as we read in john chapter 5 the dead hear the voice of the son of god and those who hear live that verse 25 refers to the first resurrection to the resurrection of the soul to a spiritual raising and lifting up from the dunghill may we be among the men in the world today at this very moment who were dead belonging to the dust belonging to the dunghill but who heard the voice of the son of god and now they live and have been set among the princes even among the princes of his people may the psalmist be describing our soul's history from the

dunghill to the throne let us pray our gracious god we give thanks that thou hast caused these words to be written in the scriptures let's speak to us of thy greatness and humility and condescension and that speak to us of our humiliation due to sin and our exaltation among the princes due to the blood and righteousness of Christ and we pray that we would know the lifting power of the almighty son of god raising us up infusing new life implanting his spirit so that we stand upon our feet an exceeding great army clothed with his righteousness living lives of holiness and of usefulness being put among the princes of the people lord may it be true that we are daughters of the king sons of the king we belong to the king we are of royal blood born commoners in the dust on the dunghill poor and needy yet through amazing grace brought among the princes of the people we have so much for which to thank thee because we have received so much from thee and we know that to whom much is given of the same much shall be required may we therefore use our blessings and the benefits of redemption for the advancement of thy kingdom and the glory of thy name and lord if there's anyone here tonight who has not been touched by that quickening power and raised into newness of life through the grace of our lord jesus christ that thou will touch that soul in its death even now that the dead would hear the voice of the son of god and live and in the light of the passing of time the reality of judgment and the coming of eternity give to all of us a sense of urgency that we will make our calling and our election sure and know indeed that we are risen with christ and have set our affections upon those things which are above we ask this for his great namesake amen again for they were begged we they came everybody they they would or or you they were anyway ■■■■■■