

The works of the Lord

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[0 : 00] Well, we will attempt to worship him together by turning again to the part of his word that we read, to the book of Psalms, and to Psalm 111.

And we may read the first three verses. Praise ye the Lord. I will praise the Lord with my whole heart in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.

The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. His work is honorable and glorious, and his righteousness endureth forever.

If this was a midweek Bible study, it would be appropriate to look at this psalm, verse by verse, and to glean from it the psalmist's thought, and to profit in that way.

But it is not a midweek Bible study. It is the Lord's Day morning. And I am conscious of the mixed groupings in the congregation.

[1 : 20] There are young families, parents with children, and it's a great joy to see them come week after week. Conscious also of the many young people who comprise our congregation.

And also of those who have been on the way much longer than I have myself. And our purpose in meeting like this today, and it ought to be the same purpose every Lord's Day.

To joy as the psalmist did in going up to the house of God. And to joy with one purpose and one express purpose in mind. To praise his name.

It was David's custom on his day to go up to the house of God, and he delighted in it. And it's our custom to this very moment to join together with the assembly of his people.

David's purpose was a single purpose. His intention was undivided. He was to worship God, as he tells us here, not half-heartedly, but with an undivided heart.

[2 : 31] To praise the Lord with his whole heart. All his energies, all his faculties were devoted to this one aim. To praise the Lord.

Now what is it? What does it mean to praise the Lord? In another place, David says, extol the Lord with me.

Let us exalt his name together. So the praise of the Lord is to exalt the Lord. To give him the place that is his due. To acknowledge that he is our creator.

He is our lawgiver. And he is our judge. But more, he is our redeemer. And to him we ascribe praise and worship.

And in seeking to praise God, we come to this, that we glorify our God. And I'm sure that if I was to ask those who haven't yet gone to school, to answer the catechism, what is our chief end?

[3 : 49] What is man's chief end? I know that some of these little ones present here today could answer that question. Our chief end, our chief purpose in life is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

That is the reason why we exist. But some find fault with that. Some lay a charge against the answer to that first question.

I remember years ago, as a young Christian, attempting to witness to an unbeliever. I remember saying to him that the chief purpose, the real reason why we are here, was to glorify our God.

And I was taken aback at his response. He said something like this. If your God is the God who wants glory for himself, I want nothing to do with him.

He is no better than Hitler. He is no better than the petty dictators of this world. That's what they seek. Their own glory.

[5 : 05] And if that's your God, I don't want anything to do with him. Now that was years ago. And I was quite taken aback.

I didn't know then how to answer him. And I would encourage the young people, particularly the young people who are present, when attack and assault is made on your faith, when you are

confronted by questions for which you have no answer, I would encourage you not to despair. Not to become despondent. That man, that unbeliever, that his argument was a flawed argument. And it was dangerously flawed.

And the answer to that man and to others who are like him is this. Indeed it is wrong for a sinful creature. Indeed it is wrong for any creature to seek his own glory.

It is not wrong for the creator who is all glorious to seek his own glory. In fact, the creator can seek nothing less than his own glory.

[6 : 17] And following on from that, the creature can seek nothing higher. It is the noblest end for any creature to ascribe glory to his creator.

He alone is blessed forever. Well, this man, the sweet singer of Israel, he had one purpose and one desire.

And that was to glorify his God and to praise his name. And in this psalm, he gives us the reason for his joy and for his desire. He was considering the works of the Lord.

And in considering the works of the Lord, we have to ask ourselves this question. Assuming, of course, that we accept the being of God.

That God is. And that is a profound step. A profound statement for any to make. That God is. The next logical step, the next logical question is to ask, if God is, how does he operate?

[7 : 32] Does he have a plan? And if he has a plan, how does he carry it out? And again, if we follow a shorter catechism, and I would commend this little book to us all, but particularly to the young.

I know that today in school, it is different to the day when your parents were there. The days of rote learning, sadly, are in the past.

But if you can memorize this book, you will lose nothing by studying it, and by committing it to your memory.

Does God have a plan? Indeed he does. And how does he bring it to pass? And the catechism again gives us an answer. He brings his plan to pass in his works.

And these works are expressly told us as the works of his creation and the works of his providence. God executes his decrees in the works of creation and in providence.

[8 : 40] And that is what David in Psalm 111 is thinking of in verse 2 when he says, The works of the Lord are great. They are great.

How great are they? He has brought into being by the word of his power, the world in which we live and worlds beyond.

He has brought the universe into existence and he upholds it. He governs all his creatures within it. And when we consider just a little, if we had time to consider just our own earth, the speck on which we stand, when we consider its position, when we consider how God is sustaining it, day after day, and then when we consider beyond the physical universe, and when we come to look at ourselves and to see how wonderfully and marvelously we are made the work of God's creation, as we heard last Sabbath morning, creating us after his own image, we are absolutely unique in the whole of God's works.

There is no one quite like yourself. The boys and girls will know that they are different to every other boy and girl.

Their thumbprint is unique. No one in the whole world has a thumbprint quite like you. When you come to study further up the school, when you come to see how we are made within, you are to ask a doctor present, what is our blood like?

[10 : 48] The doctor would tell you that we are made up of cells, and that our blood, even one drop of blood, consists of millions of cells. How many cells then?

In the whole of the human body, and each cell is a world of wonder in itself. We are fearfully and wonderfully made the works of God in creation.

What should this bring us to? It should bring us to the point where we worship him, where we glorify his name. And how can this be?

Is it possible to add to his glory? If he is all glorious already, how is it that we can glorify his name? And we glorify his name by recognizing his works, what he has done. We cannot add to it, and we cannot take from it. But in considering his glory, we give God a place that belongs uniquely to himself.

[12:00] And that ought to lead us to worship. You remember, on one occasion, the Lord Jesus was taken into the wilderness.

He was led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And the devil, in the second of his temptations, took him up to a high mountain and he showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

And he showed him the glory of these kingdoms. And he said to him, if you will bow down and worship me, all these will be yours.

I will give them to you. And you will recall also the Savior's response. It is, get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

It's very instructive to see how our Savior answered. He placed worship before service. All too often, we reverse the process.

[13:10] We are so busy with service that we relegate worship to a lower place. In heaven, where there is supreme order, there is no dichotomy, there is no division between worship and service.

There the worship, the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, and they serve him day and night in his temple. So, in Providence, and the young ones present will remember the answer to the question, what are God's works of Providence?

And you can repeat that answer to yourself. How he upholds and he governs all his creatures and all their actions. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without his knowledge.

The fish that was prepared to swallow Jonah was in the right place at the right time. The cult of the ass on which the Savior rode into Jerusalem was not there by accident.

He knows the number of the star. He counts them and he names them, every one. And if that's the case, if that's the case with the inanimate creation, if that's the case with the world of animals, how much more so with ourselves?

[14:52] The Providence of God is mysterious. Permit me an example from a recent experience of my own. just two years ago, I found myself during the summer holidays in the Russian Republic of Moldova.

And the purpose of that visit was to bring aid, particularly the scriptures, to a pastor who was ministering in the capital city of Moldova, Kishinov.

we had the pastor's telephone number, but not his address. And on the way in, the outskirts of Kishinov, we stopped to telephone.

We had a guide with us, of course. Unable to contact the pastor by telephone telephone and not knowing where he stayed. We went a little further and then stopped to distribute tracts at a bus stop.

And as these tracts were being distributed, a Russian came up and spoke in his own language to me. Naturally, I didn't understand what he was saying.

[16:17] And I spoke in my own language. And then he replied, what are you doing in my country? And when I explained that we were distributing Christian literature, he asked this question, are you a Christian?

And I said, yes, are you? Yes, he said, I'm a Christian too. Now you can imagine our joy. Here was the first Russian person that we had spoken to and he was a Christian.

Did he know Pastor Rotaro? Yes, he did. Would he take us to Pastor Rotaro's church? Yes, he would. And so, we moved on.

It was beginning to get dark and it just started to rain. He gave a last minute direction to turn left and our driver turned left.

But he turned left forgetting that he was driving on the right side of the road and a fast-moving car in the inner lane impacted with our vehicle.

[17:28] And the impact on the small car was considerable. Now you can imagine how we felt when we got out of our vehicle to find that the car into which we had crashed was a Russian police vehicle.

moments before that we had been distributing plants. We had met a Christian. The Lord's providence seemed so favorable and now apparent disaster had struck.

How do we interpret providences like that? Well, at the time it was extremely difficult. but if I can just move on a little.

At the police station later that evening as statements were taken we had the opportunity of distributing Russian Bibles to these communist police officers in the mystery of God's providence.

That's how it turned out. And just two weeks ago or three weeks ago I received through the post a complimentary copy of a Russian New Testament.

[18:47] And just last week a telephone call from someone in the town asked do you have do you still have that Russian New Testament?

Could it be given to the Russian seaman who had been taken off the submarine and was in the Louis hospital? Indeed it could.

And that Russian seaman who doesn't understand our language is present with us here this morning. That is the mystery of God's providence.

And I would ask you to join with me in asking God that the testament that was placed in his hands as he returns to his own country and as he reads it and as he's reading it quietly before me today that the word of God would be blessed to him.

That's the nature of God's mysterious providence. Let me quote to you what Matthew Henry comments on in a little book on providence.

[19:57] Matthew Henry says these sentences in the book of providence are sometimes long and you must read a great way before you understand the meaning.

The intention of providence often does not appear till a great while after the event perhaps many years after.

And a greater than Matthew Henry said this you know not what I do now but you shall know hereafter. Do you know of someone can you think of someone now whose providence is bitter and yet bitter as the providence is the person himself has risen above the bitterness and is enjoying serenity and you ask yourself how is it that a person who passes through the accusing fire of the enemy how is it that a person like that can be so serene there is but one answer and that answer is the abundant grace of God.

It has always been the case and I'm sure it always will that the choicest of his servants the best of his people are the ones who are called to pass through the hottest of princes.

It was the case with our saviour his was not an easy providence and as for the master so with the disciple all things will work together for good.

[21:51] Jacob said these things are against me. Joseph is not and Benjamin is not but little did he know that there was one who had gone before him and was working all these things together for his good.

Now I don't know what your providence is today neither do you know what my providence is but there is one who does know and one alone who can help us.

Listen to Matthew Henry again. The best way to consider the great question of the origin of evil is to consider the end of it.

What good comes out of it? Why was this man born blind? That Christ might cure him. Why did man fall?

That God might raise him. Why does the body of man die? That God might bring it to life again. Someone has put it in verse like this concerning God's providence in triumph.

[23:06] Though he slay me I will trust him for he knows just how to mold how to melt and shape my spirit. I shall then come forth as gold.

That's his purpose. Satan's purpose in sifting the Lord's people is to consume the wheat and to leave the chaff.

God's purpose is so different. He consumes the chaff and he leaves the wheat. Or to change the figure he consumes the dross until the gold is refined.

Coming finally to verse three. We have considered altogether two briefly. We've considered the works of God in creation and the works of God in providence.

And David's comment on them is that they are great. But in the next verse he considers another work. And he speaks of it as a singular work.

[24:16] And this work of God is above all his other works. What would you say? What would you say it is? The work of God that crowns all his other works.

Well David gives us the answer in the ninth verse. He sent redemption to his people. That is his crowning work. And in the work of redemption see the wisdom of God.

Who would have thought it was to be this way? I have not seen neither have ever heard never did it enter into the heart of man the things that God had prepared for them that love him.

But he has revealed these to us by his spirit. It could be no other way. Trace the steps of his humiliation from his birth in a low condition.

Trace it step by step in a downward path. The foxes had their holes. The birds of the air had their nests.

[25 : 32] The son of man had nowhere to lay his head. On another occasion we read this. Every man went to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

See him in the garden. His disciples, his closest friends, had fallen asleep. And he goes a little further. A stone was thrown away.

And he prays. and he sweats. And the book tells us that his sweat was as it were great drops of blood.

And it was a cold night. We know it was a cold night because later that night the soldier made a fire of coals and warmed themselves by the fire.

And yet he was sweating. How was that? He was doing business with the sword that earlier much earlier the sword that turned this way and that way the sword of God's justice that barred the way to the tree of life after man fell.

[26 : 49] He was doing business with that sword and he went out to meet it and he met it all alone. And as he met it he sheathed it so that that sword the sword of God's justice will never again rise against any of his people.

See him also on the cross at Calvary. See the darkness that covered the face of the earth from the sixth hour to the ninth hour.

And that darkness when the natural sun did its face that darkness as someone once said was but a shadow of the darkness through which the Son of God was passing when he saved his people from the outer darkness.

There is a wealth in these few words. He went through a darkness that his people will never have to experience. His father hid his face from him but finally he cried it is finished and see him now exalted at the right hand of power all authority all majesty is his and he is coming again.

One day every knee shall bow not all knees bow today one day every tongue will confess not all tongues confess today but one day they will and they will confess to the glory of God the Father that he is Lord and there is none quite like him.

[28 : 38] Now what should be the outworking of this teaching in our own lives? Surely it should be that we yield obedience willingly and lovingly and daily to himself.

Whether we're at school whether we're at work whether we're at home wherever he has placed us it ought to be our duty and our delight to give obedience to his law.

finally this what is the effect on the soul of seeing a glimpse of the glory of God?

There ought to be an effect. Permit one final illustration. Years ago when Martin's Memorial Church in the town was the Stornoway Free Church on a Friday on a question Friday of the Communion one of the men was asked to speak to the question and he was asked three times to stand and he refused to stand and on a fourth occasion the minister said to him if you don't stand to speak the service will draw to a conclusion and the man stood up and looking down to the clay floor on which he stood he said something like this I feel today like the clay floor on which I'm standing and he sat down the service proceeded and the minister who summed up said this if I'm not mistaken he said if I'm not mistaken the brother who said but little is not far from the kingdom of glory that was a Friday on the

Monday the good man was no longer on the scene of time how do you explain an incident of that type he was but a short distance from glory is it not similar to the experience that Isaiah had when he saw the Lord high and lifted up and when he got a glimpse of the glory of God the effect that that had on Isaiah was this woe is me for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips the more we see of the glory of God the more we will see our own corruption that's the way it always was and that's the way it will be here we see through our glass darkly but then face to face may God prepare each one of us for the day when we shall see not as we see at present but when we shall see him as we