

- *What work do you do on a daily basis? Commit this into God's hands and ask Him to show you how He is interested in what you do. It may not be obvious to you, so do give the Lord some space to answer the question!*
- *Pray for those young people especially who know that they cannot bear children, and are trying to come to terms with what it means to be without hope for the gift of children. Medicine today can give some people hope, but our God can do more than that!*

Final Prayer

This day, Lord God, is Your precious gift to each of us. Keep us from falling and fulfil Your purposes in us throughout our lives. Bring us to the end of each day rejoicing, and as Your disciples, may we be glad to be Your servant and praise You through all we do and say. AMEN

Prayer

We love You, Jesus Christ. We love You with a passion beyond all earthly meaning, because in You we find life, freedom from death, victory over evil, healing from pain and suffering, and the liberty to be true to ourselves and to You. Because we find our purpose and fulfilment in You, and the only word which sums up our feelings is 'love'. May we never misuse or abuse what that word means, or our relationship with you. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Coming Year

Some people will have difficult memories of last year for various reasons. Pray for those you know who need to find God's peace concerning what happened last year.

On-going prayers

- *Pray and give thanks for those who work in Christian missions*
- *Give thanks for God's blessings for you and your family in 2008*
- *Pray for people who work hard in shops over Christmas time*

Meditation

We long to be Your disciples, Lord Jesus: may our lives be:

Full of praise to You, our Lord and our God;
 Full of love and compassion for people we meet;
 Full of peace for our fears have been taken away;
 Full of truth and justice within a troubled world;
 Full of integrity and free from deceit and lies;
 Full of contentedness with all we have been given;
 Full of hope for the future for we feel safe with You;

We long to be made perfect and complete in You, Lord Jesus.

Bible Study - Psalm 113

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| ¹ <i>Praise the LORD.</i> | ⁵ <i>Who is like the LORD our God,
seated on His throne so high?</i> |
| <i>Praise, you servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD.</i> | ⁶ <i>Stooping down low to look on
the heavens and the earth;</i> |
| ² <i>May the name of the LORD be
blessed,
from now on and for evermore.</i> | ⁷ <i>Raising the poor from the dust
to lift the destitute from the ash
heap;</i> |
| ³ <i>From the rising of the sun to its
setting,
may the name of the LORD be
praised.</i> | ⁸ <i>Making them sit with princes,
with the princes of His people!</i> |
| ⁴ <i>The LORD is high above all the
nations,
and His glory above the heavens.</i> | ⁹ <i>Giving the barren woman a home
to make her the joyous mother of
children.</i> |
| | <i>Praise the LORD.</i> |

Review

This wonderful psalm of praise is another 'Halleluiah' psalm like the one we studied yesterday (Psalm 111). The structure of the psalm is very simple, beginning and ending with the one word 'Halleluiah', meaning 'Praise the Lord'; with two clear sections in-between. The first of these consists of the first four verses which contains a call to praise (113:1-3) followed by a reason for that praise (113:4). The second section begins with a question (113:5) and answers this with four responses in each of the four verses (113:5-9).

All this becomes clear as we study, but it is obvious that the whole psalm is an expression of joy in the glorious majesty of God who cares for His people and is willing to be involved in their lives. Because of this, the psalm is most appropriate for Christmas time, celebrating Jesus' coming to earth to be with God's people in everyday life. The psalm also links with the New Testament in a number of ways, all of which relate to Jesus life of humility on earth. For example, what the psalm says about 'stooping down low' to the earth (113:6) reminds us of Paul's famous description of Jesus' life as a servant in his letter to the Philippians (2:5-11); and 'lifting up the poor' (113:7) reminds us of Mary's famous song of praise (the 'Magnificat') spoken when she first heard that she was pregnant with Jesus (Luke 1:52,53).

An invitation to praise The psalm calls on a group of people, the 'servants of the Lord' to worship and praise God. It is thought that this could well refer to a group of people on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (as with the other 'Halleluiah' psalms - see yesterday's study), because the special dedication required to make a pilgrimage was considered sufficient to call such people God's 'servants'.

The journey to Jerusalem would take several days, and travellers would be particularly aware of the rising and setting of the sun, which determined when people could travel or had to set up camp for the night. Prayers said at the setting and rising of camp may be reflected in the well known phrase; 'From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised!' The psalm continues with the acclamation; 'the Lord is exalted above the nations ...' meaning that the Lord was the greatest of all gods, and Jerusalem was the most important place of worship amongst the nations. For the ancient people of Israel this was a key statement of faith about God, and it highlighted what they believed at a time when other people around them worshipped all kinds of gods including the 'Ba'als' (see Elijah's campaign against such gods - 1 Kings 17f.). True worshippers of God needed to declare publicly that they worshipped the Lord and Him alone; it was a powerful statement of faith.

What has this to do with us? As we discovered yesterday, the way that the psalm is written reflects these ancient practices, but has been generalised so that the words suit a variety of situations. Today, we can use the psalm to give glory to God for making Himself known to us in Jesus Christ, who came to earth as a child; and the wonderful phrase about 'the rising of the sun to its setting' reminds us that God made everything that exists and is also interested in the daily lives of the people He has made. The praises in these verses are able to inspire us in many ways.

What God does The truly wonderful part of this psalm comes in the second half, where the question is raised 'Who is like the Lord our God?', and this sounds like a challenge to other people to suggest otherwise! True believers, however, are able to witness to the Lord's great power, and this is illustrated in each of the four following verses which describe four actions of God in 'stooping', 'raising', 'making (sit)' and 'giving' (113:6-9).

Verse 6 answers the question about who God is like by describing Him as One who stoops. He crosses the divide between His dwelling place and earth by reaching down to do things which make a difference in the world. Surely this is just what God did in Jesus, and we

describe this work of God in sending His Son as the 'Incarnation'; God, who is a spiritual being, becomes human flesh so that we might know Him!

Having done this, verse 7 describes God as like One 'raising the poor from the dust ...' This is one of the many Old and New Testament texts which indicate God's concern for the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. In this it reminds us of Jesus' teaching 'blessed are the poor in heart ...' and the way in which Jesus lived His life amongst ordinary people, and not those who had positions of influence and power. Indeed, this is what made Jesus so threatening to the leaders in His day.

The Lord then 'makes' the poor take the places of princes (see verse 8), which sounds just like the kind of teaching Jesus Himself might give when explaining the fact that the values of the Kingdom of God were quite different to those of this earth; He said, 'The last will be first and the first last' (Matt 19:30f.). Indeed, one wonders whether Jesus Himself was inspired by this very psalm! In God's eyes, princes and people are all alike.

Lastly, the psalm paints a heart-warming picture of God's healing and caring work amongst people, 'giving' the barren woman a 'home'; enabling her to bear children so that she had a real 'home' where children grew up and continued the family inheritance. People appear less concerned about such things today, but apparently 'easy' attitudes towards such things are miss-placed; bearing children remains a highly emotive issue for both women and men, especially when they are unable to conceive as they might expect. Everyone regards the bearing of children as a 'human right', but we do well to remember that conception and the bearing of children is deeply spiritual, and God wants to work with us in this.

The fact that God is as involved as this in the things of life is a testament to His unique power and authority. Surely, only a God who is with His people like this is worth believing in! Our God, the creator of the world, is present and active with us now, 'praise the Lord'!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Does this psalm inspire you to praise God, and if so, how? Share your response to this question in your group.
2. Would you describe yourself as a 'servant of the Lord', and if so, what might you mean by this?
3. The last four verses of this psalm give examples of God's presence in the world. What examples would you give?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This is a really simple and yet very powerful psalm. Personally, I feel very challenged by the idea of being one of God's servants. The word 'service' means 'worship' as well as 'doing things' for God, so to be one of God's servants mean that I must be one who is about His work, throughout everything I do. Some say that must be all right for me because I am ordained and have given myself to this work, but I can assure you that when I worked in industry, I felt deeply that the work I did was work for the Lord. Even though I was designing and manufacturing equipment in a factory! Why should this not be of interest to God? He is interested in everything that people do, and His servants recognise this, as in this psalm.

Ideas for discipleship programme