

[CNY Bonus Habit!] Exalt the Lord our God

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[0 : 00] How great is our God, sing with me, how great is our God, all will see how great, how great is our God.

Good morning. Thank you indeed for reading Psalm 99 for us.

The Psalms are a collection of writings by several authors. The most well-known Psalmist, of course, is King David.

And Bible scholars tell us that other Psalm writers include Solomon, Moses, Melchizedek, and Asaph.

You would have noticed that some Psalms are anonymous, in that the Bible does not record the author's name.

[1 : 16] Nonetheless, these Psalms remain the authoritative word of God. Psalms come in a few songwriters, including songs of trust.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.

You know that one, Psalm 23. The praise Psalms are easily identifiable because of their emphasis on praising God.

He may be praised as the Creator. The heavens declare the glory of God. As the deliverer of Israel, He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping, and so on.

John Calvin, the theologian, calls the psalter, the collection of Psalms, an anatomy of all parts of the human soul, because it reflects the full range of human emotions.

[2 : 33] This morning, we shall together be studying one of the praise Psalms, which was read for us earlier, Psalm 99, and to hear what God has to say to us through the psalmist.

Before that, shall we pray. Have mercy upon me, my Heavenly Father, for I have no wisdom except what you have graciously bestowed.

I pray this morning that you will teach us and give each one present an unquestionable reason to praise you. May the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you and be a blessing to your people who hunger to hear your gracious, life-giving wisdom, who hunger to hear of your eternal love for them and your desire to lead them to live a life in accordance to your word.

This, Father, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. The psalm under consideration this morning, Psalm 99, is the last of what is considered the Royal Psalms, 93 to 99, and falls into the category of praise Psalms.

The author of Psalm 99 is not named in the Bible. The psalm praises God's holiness, His sovereignty, and declares His justice.

[4 : 06] It calls on His people to humble themselves before God and to worship Him. He reminds them of His mercy and promises them forgiveness by redemption of their sins.

The psalm reminds the reader that whatever sin, whatever his sin against the Holy God, the severity of divine justice, is tempered by a loving God who so deeply loves His creation that He does not want anyone to perish but all to come to repentance from sin.

If you've never seen the greatness of God, then many other lesser things may become important in your life or even attractive.

For example, if you have never seen the sun, a street light may impress you. On a daily basis, you and I are bombarded by numerous messages in the media, social media, that we expect, even demand, to be enticed into reading.

There's a whole body of skill in making a media posting attractive to us. This can carry over even when we open our Bibles.

[5 : 48] See, the opening lines of Psalm 99 may appear familiar. Let the Lord reigns. It's a line that Christians see many times when they open their Bibles.

Many Psalms start off praising God for His various attributes. Have you ever encountered a street, a small street, so unimpressive that you are disinclined to enter it?

A street like that? Psalm 99 is a bit like that. The opening lines are common and almost cliched.

But let's enter it this morning and explore it with great expectation. The Psalm promises a vision of God and gives us a steadfast and irrefutable reason to praise God.

If you have your Bibles with you, please open it with me to Psalm 99. Psalm 99. Verses 1 to 3 of Psalm 99 opens with a powerful declaration.

[7 : 09] The Lord reigns. It sets the tone for the entire passage, emphasizing the sovereignty and the authority of God.

The psalmist invites us to look upon and respond to the majesty and the kingship of God, O Yahweh, O the Great I Am.

Unlike any earthly king, the Lord's reign is universal over all the earth, over every individual that inhabits this earth.

the Lord reigns over kings, princes, presidents, and prime ministers. And the verse continues by inviting the people to tremble in awe before the presence of God.

It reflects the reverence and the fear that all men should have when approaching a holy and almighty God.

[8 : 22] This trembling before God's throne is not brought about by terror, but out of deep respect, acknowledging the awesome power and holiness of God.

It is appropriate that we tremble before the presence of God. Indeed, all men, whether they be of the highest rank or of the humblest rank, will tremble before God.

All men. Let me explain. Sinners saved by God will tremble with devout emotion.

While sinners choosing to stand far away from Him or those who choose to ignore or oppose Him will tremble too, but they will tremble with terror.

It calls to mind the image that the prophet Isaiah paints when he said, I saw the Lord high and exalted seated on a throne and His train then the train of His robe filled the temple.

[9 : 39] Isaiah had a high image of God. in His holy presence we ought to feel our most sinful and our most unworthiness.

The image of God sitting enthroned among the cherubim, verse 1, symbolizes His presence in the heavenly reign. Now this image comes from the design of the Ark of the Covenant.

The two cherubim, heavenly beings on the top of the Ark, face each other with their wings spread upward.

The cherubim, angelic beings associated with God's glory, represent God's majesty and holiness. And God spoke to the Israelites from between the cherubim.

That is the seat of his authority. The Israelites carried the Ark of the Covenant with them for 40 years during the desert wanderings after their exit from Egypt.

[10 : 54] After that, it was kept in the temple at Jerusalem. Jerusalem. This image reminds us of the complete excellence, self-sufficiency and supremacy of the God of the Old Testament and the New Testament, the God of the Bible.

He is sitting in the heavenly throne, ruling over all creation, the whole world, every corner of it, without exception.

in verse 2, the Psalmist exclaims that the Lord is great in Zion, Zion being God's dwelling place, the location of his temple in Jerusalem.

It signifies his presence among his people, his special relationship among his chosen nation and his proximity, his desire to be near his people.

So God's rule and authority extends from the highest heaven all the way to his earthly dwelling place in the Ark of the Covenant.

[12 : 11] The Psalmist further emphasizes that God is above all peoples. This statement emphasizes his high position above all nations with that exception.

It signifies his supreme authority and superiority over all human powers. But regardless of how mighty or influential earthly rulers may appear, God's position is unmatched unrivaled.

God is sovereign in that he is influenced by nobody. In short, you cannot bribe God to obtain his favor.

And the Psalmist will explain why a little later. God calls for the praise of God's great and awesome name because the essential quality that God possesses, he is holy.

God's name also speaks of his character and his nature and his reputation. It encompasses all that he is and all that he has revealed about himself in his word.

[13 : 38] By praising his name, we acknowledge and honor his attributes, his holiness, his righteousness, his love, and his faithfulness.

It's an expression of worship and adoration of who he is and what he is. Verse three of the Psalm declares that God is holy.

The description of God as holy is also repeated at the end of verse five and at the end of verse nine. Holiness is one of the defining characteristics of God.

And part of it is that he does not tolerate sin. His absolute purity and separatedness from sin and perfection, it's an intrinsic part of his character.

His holiness sets him apart from all created beings. Acknowledging God's holiness evokes in us a reverence and an awe as we recognize his absolute moral purity and the inherent and essential distinction.

[14 : 57] It is the inherent and essential distinction between God and all of his creation. So verses one to three of Psalm 99 can be summarized as God's reign over all the nations.

Awe and trembling is our duty before him. God desires to have a presence with his people and to relate to them the greatness and the supremacy of God and his holiness.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, how do we approach our encounter with God on a daily basis? Do our prayer times, our meditation, or devotions arouse in us a fresh and a precious vision of God, high and lifted up?

Do we delight in it? Or is it a hurried exercise, rushing through a few scripture verses, followed by a sprinting glance, at our favorite devotion?

Do we view praying as a last go-to, a duty to be tolerated and done mechanically without our hearts in it?

[16 : 26] Or do we view God as just being a distant, not to be feared, and casual friend whom we call on now and then?

like the psalmist, are we mindful that our encounter with God ought to be awe-inspiring moment, arousing in us a consciousness of our wretched unworthiness because of our sin, and our total consciousness that we are in the presence of a holy, almighty God, perfect, and above all creation. you see, in the evangelical tradition that we are in, we are taught that we have such ready and constant access to God that we can treat access to God casually.

How do we approach our private devotion or prayer times? with the TV running in the background?

During COVID, when BEM Kuching Evangelical Church held Sunday church services online, how many of us attended the online services in our bedclothes with a cup of coffee in the hand?

For some, that was a tempting idea. I shall not ask for a show of hands this morning. Our God reigns over all.

[18 : 20] He desires to be in a relationship with you. His supremacy exceeds all peoples, nations, and powers. He is holy, morally pure, and there is a wide and deep chasm between a sinful us and a holy hymn.

Having taken a glance, just a glance of the glory of God high and lifted up, the psalmist goes on in verses four and five to dwell on God's essential character.

God's He is king, and he loves justice. His justice is not harsh, but justice nonetheless.

I'm very acquainted with justice. It's an important part of my work. Justice requires any wrongdoing and sin to be punished.

And the biblical penalty for sin is death. No negotiation about that. death. That sentence of death for the sins of all the people in the world, including the people sitting here this morning, was imposed on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, 2,000 years ago, so that all who believe in Him shall not face death for their sins, but instead have eternal life.

[20 : 06] Jesus Christ's death on the cross satisfies the just requirements of God's law. And the benefit of that death is now available to every sinner, including you and me.

This means, this is the meaning of God's justice and equity. See, justice alone would have been harsh. Just turning a blind eye to sin would have been an injustice to those wronged, those who have suffered from the sin.

So in theory, God's great strength and sovereignty could have been used for evil. Isn't that what history records for us? In the lives of many kings over all the earth.

That is not the case with the divine king that the psalmist speaks of. His sovereignty means he's influenced by no one and is accountable to no one.

In verses 4 and 5, this divine king who loves justice has also established equity.

[21 : 22] justice simply means giving each person what he or she deserves. And as a result, justice can be harsh, hard, and cruel.

You have seen that when you read the newspapers, people who are sentenced for various criminal offenses. But that's not what God's justice looks like.

With his equity, he has transferred the penalty from you to his son.

Equity goes beyond justice. See, the underlying principle is that without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness.

That's an underlying principle that you must need to hold on to and remember. It is not something complicated. For example, most people may not be able to quote the rules of the law, but are able to say quite correctly most times, something is not right.

[22 : 37] That doesn't sound right. See, the notion of equity is informing their thoughts and their opinions. Inflexible application of the law, harsh results.

And even the courts in this country have the authority to apply equity in suitable cases. But with God, he himself has provided a way out of the harshness of the law.

God himself has provided a way out of the harshness of his law.

He has established equity and demolished every system of injustice, allowing only what is right to remain. See, God's equity is not a nullification of his justice.

His equity tempers the hardness and the harshness of the law. God's justice punishes the sin. But at the same time, his love of his creation has caused him in his omniscience, meaning his all-knowingness, to put in motion a salvation plan from the beginning of time.

[24 : 00] Not an afterthought. God's plan to soften or to reduce the harshness of his judgment was there at the beginning of time.

A plan that forgives the sinner and destroys the sin. So with God, justice and equity are not just slogans.

He has carried out justice among his people and in the world. Jesus Christ, born 2,000 years ago, to bear the punishment for your sin and my sin, so that everyone, irrespective of how horrible a life you have, and how vast the sins that you have committed, can obtain forgiveness and avoid the punishment of death.

It's very special. God's justice and God's equity is very, very special, not found in any other thought or religion in the world.

So in verse 5, we are called to exalt the Lord our God and to worship at his footstool. Understanding the power, holiness, and the goodness of God should move us to exalt him.

[25 : 30] Why? Because every sinner who deserves death has a way out, a just way out.

Now, worshipping at his footstool, we don't have footstools these days, may cause a little bit of confusion, but it refers to the position that God occupies in the middle between the cherubims on the Ark of the Covenant.

Now, Jerusalem, the whole earth, are sometimes also referred to as God's footstools. You've got the references on the wall for us.

verse 5 concludes with a repeated reminder that God is holy. The rest of the psalm focuses on the good news of this morning for you.

See, when Moses and his brother and the prophet Samuel, God's priest, spoke to God, the people, spoke on behalf of the Israeli people, and God answered them from the pillar of cloud.

[26 : 56] The pillar of cloud being the symbol of God's presence with his people during their 40 years wandering around in the wilderness. Turn with me to, look with me to verses 6 to 9 of the psalm.

all three men were intermediaries between their people and God, and when they heard from God, they prophesied to their people.

So they were spokesmen in both directions. Moses, Aaron, and Samuel are pointed out for their intercessory role between God and his chosen people.

They were Old Testament icons of faith. A good example of this was when God was prepared to destroy the whole of the Israeli nation in the desert after they built themselves an idol in the form of a golden calf.

God's anger, if you're taking notes, it's in Exodus chapter 32 to 34, Exodus chapter 2 to 34. God's anger burned against them, but Moses interceded and pleaded with God while reminding God of his earlier promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[28 : 27] What was God's gracious response? It was mercy to this wrongdoers. this mercy of God is available today to us.

This mercy of God is available today to us. But God's demand of holiness in his people remain valid to this day.

Just because God is prepared to extend mercy is not a license for us to continue sinning. You see, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews in the New Testament tells us today that we can have great confidence to approach God's throne of grace because Jesus himself, the great high priest, intercedes on our behalf.

So in terms of relationship with God, he's the son of God, and he's without sin. If God heard the intercessory prayers of his prophets, how much more will he hear and answer the intercessory prayer of his own son?

A Scottish pastor about 250 years ago said, and I quote, if I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies.

[30 : 03] Yet the distance makes no difference, he's praying for me. Let me say that again. If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies.

Yet the distance makes no difference, he's praying for me. Brothers and sisters, we have this morning made a number of important discoveries in Psalm 99.

We have learned that God is holy and we ought to be in awe and trembling before him. He is the king above all kings. his perfect justice is accompanied by his equity.

When his people call on him now and at any time in the future, he will answer. And today, his son Jesus Christ intercedes for you and me before the divine throne.

Early this morning, I showed you the picture of a street. it's a narrow cobbled street in Jerusalem that runs from the place where Jesus was sentenced to death to the place where he was crucified.

[31 : 30] It's called the Via Dolorosa. Jesus was crucified not for his sins, but for your sins and mine.

On a trip to Jerusalem many years ago, I had a chance to walk this route. It's narrow, ordinary, and several parts along the route were flanked with shops selling food, clothes, tourist trinkets, and such.

I imagine what it was like on the day that Jesus, carrying his cross, walk the Via Dolorosa, the Latin for the sorrowful way.

People on that day 2,000 years ago must have been oblivious to an unknown prisoner going to his death sentence.

Are you going to make the same mistake this morning? Remaining oblivious to, just like the traders on the road, that Jesus died for your sin?

[32 : 51] Are you going to carry on your life as normal? Never mind what goes on on the side.

Family, business, work, hobbies, can absorb you and drain you of all your energy and your time.

Psalm 99 reminds us to praise him because of his exalted position. He is the God of justice. He is the God who offers forgiveness of sin and redemption to eternal life through his son, Jesus Christ.

He is the God who sent his own son to pay the price for my sin and your sin. If you're a visitor to BEM Kuching Evangelical Church this morning, and I've never heard the good news that the God of the Bible is holy, almighty, and desires to be in a relationship with his creation, yet at the same time is just and will punish sinners, even of sins that others cannot see, do you know that this judge, this God in his just mercy offers you forgiveness of sin by his son dying on the cross for you?

God. You see, in Romans chapter 6 verse 23, it says, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ.

[34 : 51] It changes the whole equation for you. it gives you a reason to praise God that you need not walk the rest of your life burdened by the anxiety of sin and its punishment.

Jesus offers you salvation today, salvation from the punishment of sin. That salvation is free to you.

the price was paid by Jesus Christ, the Son of God, 2,000 years ago. If you call yourself a Christian and are already familiar with his Son, Jesus Christ, do you come to the Word of God in joy or in praise?

Do you look forward with joy to explore this street this is the street that Jesus walked?

This is the street that Jesus walked, the Via Della Rosa for you. He walked to his death. Do you remember and cherish it?

[36 : 11] Do you recall the moment when you encountered Jesus face to face and had the burden of your sin lifted? My friends, there are two kinds of blindness.

I have never been to medical school, but I'm told that the first type of blindness of the eyes, you need a doctor to fix it.

the second type of blindness is the blindness of the heart. The second type of blindness is intentional, voluntary, and your doctor cannot fix it.

But you, as an individual this morning, can decide to have a change of heart. You can this morning ask God's Holy Spirit to speak to your heart and help you see the wonderful hope that the God of the Bible offers you.

You can choose to see the creator, almighty God, perfect, high, and holy. Just like God heard Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, this same God delights to hear you and to answer the cry of your heart, to be relieved of the burden of sin in your life.

[37 : 49] Your opinion of yourself doesn't matter. The word of God invites you, actually commands you. You see, without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sin.

that blood has been shed. What stands in front of you is the gift of eternal life by the forgiveness of sins. There is salvation only in Jesus Christ, and we have every reason to praise God for his plans to save man.

What must you do that you may know that your sins are taken away by the blood of Christ? The answer is this. trust Jesus. The promise, the Bible promises that Jesus will come again.

Jesus will come again. If you do not die to sin, you shall die for sin.

in Christ, your past is settled, your present is covered, and your future is secure.

[39 : 16] Let us pray. heavenly father, your word reminds us to praise you, because you are deserving of all honor and worship as the creator, as king of heaven and earth, and as the fountain of justice and equity.

And as a strict loving father that desires that none should perish, but all should come to eternal life through your son, Jesus Christ. We praise you this morning, that you are high and lifted up.

We praise you for your justice, we praise you for your equity, and we praise you for your offer of forgiveness of sins. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.