

Readings: Romans 15:5-13; Psalm 117

Theme: Praise the Lord!

When it comes to food, are you a sweet or savoury person? Although I like both savoury and sweet food, I think I am predominantly a sweet person i.e. I prefer the deserts, puddings and all things sweet! Matthew Henry wrote in his introduction to this little Psalm “*This psalm is short and sweet... if we rightly understood and considered it, we should sing it oftener for the sweetness of it,*” It is a short psalm that packs a big punch and deals with a large topic. The unknown writer in some 3 brief sentences includes the whole world and Paul picks up on this in Romans 15:11 as he celebrated God including and bringing in Gentiles, non-Jews, into God’s family and shows this was not an afterthought on God’s part.

It is a Psalm of praise, a Hallel Psalm – a series of these run from Psalm 113-118 named by the ancient Jews “Egyptian Hallel Psalms” (*as Egypt is referred to in 114:1*). According to Jewish tradition the singing of these 6 Psalms were part of the ritual of the ancient Passover meal and may even have been sung by the Lord Jesus (*Psalms 113 & 114 before the meal and the rest after it*). It is thought that the Psalter was completed after the exile from Babylon and this little psalm would have caused the restored exiles to think big - even in the face of aggressive enemies and the superpower of the day against them at times. They were to remember, realise and recognise they were part of God’s design and plan which would include people from all tribes and nations. As a church we can feel small and insignificant, but we are part of God’s gloriously big and amazing plan - to invite and bring

people everywhere, especially here in Wheatley, to turn to God and praise Him with us. I want to look at 4 brief things from this smallest of Psalms:

1. Worship (v1)

There is a clear summons, call and instruction to worship the Lord. The word Hallel = praise and notice the word LORD is all in capitals as the psalmist is using God's glorious name Jehovah or Yahweh in the fuller form in this verse. Usually we use the 2 words together in English and other languages and say "*Hallelujah*". This is what the psalmist calls on people to do - to praise the Lord, raise their Hallelujahs. This is a good, great and right way to start a New Year - by praising the Lord for who He is and what He has done for us, as well as all He will do for us in the year ahead. We can look back with thankfulness and praise and also look forward with trust and confidence in this great God. As believers, despite our hurt, heartaches, difficulties, losses and crosses, we have every reason to praise God - for His saving work, His keeping work, the blessings of life even if we have had hurting times, for His grace has brought us into a New Year. Yet this summons, this call to worship is also linked to:

2. Witness (v1)

The Psalmist is not content to have his own people worshipping God, but he understood and recognised that the people, the nation of Israel were to be a witness and light to the world - to all the nations and peoples round about them. The word translated as "*nations*" is often translated "Gentiles" i.e. non-Jews and the word "*peoples*" refers to

those nations outside of Israel i.e. the many peoples of the world. The people of Israel were to live and show that their God was great and made a difference to them. Yes the Israelites were to be *separate* from the Gentiles, but not *isolated* from them and were to present their glorious God to them - God had called Abraham to found a nation that would bring blessing to all the earth and lift up the light of their God. Sadly they did not; they became darkened and influenced by the world around them and instead of giving the light of the knowledge of the Lord to the world, they became indifferent and antagonistic to God and the world around them.

The psalmist has a passion and an evangelistic longing to call people to worship his God and to learn how great and glorious He is. He wanted them to taste and see that the Lord is good and join in worshipping Him. Here is a call to those outside of God's people to seek and to find God for themselves, then to praise Him and extol, adore, laud and declare how great the Lord is for themselves. The word extol in NIV is praise in AV is a different word in v1 from Hallel and is translated "laud" or "extol" in other versions and it has the force of meaning to boast, extol, laud and basically to tell of and brag of the Lord and of how great He is!

What a passionate desire the psalmist had and we are to have that same passionate desire for our family members, friends, neighbours and work colleagues to come to realise and find out for themselves how great the Lord is. Our desire is that as we brag of Him and tell of all He has done for us, as we extol Him by our life and lip, so others will think the better

of Him and they will want what, or rather who we have! We, our church, are still to carry the gospel out to the world. Paul wanted to do so and he quotes this verse in Romans 15:11 and through his ministry and work many in the nations and peoples believed in Jesus and came to praise and extol the Lord for the Saviour that Jesus is and the so great salvation He gives.

We are to have a longing to do the same. Some people are happy to belong to a cosy religious club and call it a church, but I do not want this church to be only a cosy place where we sit about just delighting in meeting together. We are to be a worshipping and active community who know God's love, with it being worked out among us. Yet as a worshipping people we will not keep the reason for our worship to ourselves and it will make us discontented that others do not know what an amazing Saviour the Lord Jesus is, and are not worshipping with us. Surely his should cause us to pray and to have a desire to reach out and long to tell others of our Saviour and we will find with the apostles that we cannot keep quiet about our Saviour, for in Acts 4:20 the apostles said, even after being threatened, "*For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.*" True worship will drive us to witness of our Saviour and seek our God to work in others so that they too will come to know our lovely Saviour.

3. Wonderful (v2)

The psalmist explains why he wants the nations and all the peoples to praise and extol his Lord and he starts by saying "*For...*" Our text card makes a good glorious statement, but

it is really the basis and glorious reason to worship and witness. Here the psalmist gives a twofold reason and says wonderful, amazing and glorious things of his and our Lord. Firstly he points all to the greatness of the love of the Lord. Other versions have different translations of the word hesed - merciful kindness (AV); mercy and lovingkindness (Amplified); lovingkindness (NASB) with the NIV translating the word as love. The word hesed has a full meaning of those translations and more; and basically he says this Lord is absolutely wonderful. Isn't it incredible that He could love people like us. Yet that is what the Lord does, for our God is not neutral and cool toward us, but is actively for us and His love is towards us. His love, goodness, mercy, lovingkindness reaches out, comes out to us as creatures of time, space and dust. That is absolutely wonderful and incredible.

Yet the psalmist also tells us of the Lord's truth (AV), truth and faithfulness (Amplified), of the faithfulness of the Lord (NIV) that it is eternal and endures forever. It is this Lord to which he calls, summons the nations and the peoples to praise, for He is so wonderful and beyond understanding. He has an everlasting love and is eternally faithful to Himself, His word, His plans and purposes and to the promises He makes. This is especially so to those who have Him as their God - in OT the believing Israelites and a smaller number of non-Jews. The psalmist says this God is so wonderful he wants all to ponder who He is, what He's like, to know and praise Him.

As Christians we have tasted, feasted on the love, mercy and faithfulness of God in the gospel and have drunk deeply and sweetly of His mercy and grace. Surely we'd want others to know our Saviour and God; come to know His love towards us and them; to know He is the faithful God in every way - His nature, love, care, keeping, help, grace, mercy, power, promises and I could go on much more! Don't we have a great and wonderful Saviour! We should find our hearts longing for others to know and see the Lord is wonderful, great and glorious. Because of His love, lovingkindness and mercies we are not consumed and if He can save us, change us, then He can do it for others. We are saved by grace, we live in and are kept by grace and are totally reliant on the Lord's generosity in and through the Lord Jesus. We have no reason to boast in or of our own achievements, but are to boast, brag about, praise and extol our God and Saviour, His love and faithfulness when we deserve nothing at all from Him.

This is to liberate us as we are not to be concerned over our own reputations, be self obsessed etc, but we work, live and love for His reputation and glory and are able to point people to our lovely God and Saviour, to all He has done for, is doing for and will do for us - no matter what He lovingly and wisely lets come our way. In all that comes our way we are to remember He loves us and is forever faithful to Himself, His word and to us. We have glorious and wonderful promises to learn of, lean on and work out in our lives. Even when our time on earth will one day end, that will be the time when we will most clearly and fully see how

faithful and loving He has always been and then we will fully see He is:

4. Worthy (v2b)

Our church here in Wheatley is a microcosm of the Church on earth and in heaven, as we are from various nations, even peoples within those nations. This is what the church is meant to be - see Acts 2 where the church suddenly grew from 120 to over 3000 and it had diverse people from different nationalities in it! That is brilliant and as it should be - for the gospel is not restricted to class, education, culture or country of people's origin, but it is for whosoever will believe. Then they will be made part of the Lord's people in the Church and hopefully belong to a church locally. I know that doesn't always work out in the local situation as we have different temperaments, backgrounds, have our own hang ups, have our own ups and downs, stains of sin affecting us and strains from sin in and among us, but one day the whole Church will be triumphant and we all as believers will be in the choir celestial and sing the praise of the Lamb as never before. We will hear the great angelic choir singing: Revelation 5:11-12 *'Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!"'*

Yet we will not be bystanders only, for we will be among the multitude which no man can number and we will cry out in a

loud voice as in Revelation 7:9-10 *'After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*' Basically we will be saying Hallelujah - which is what this little psalm ends with and it is to reverberate and echo in our hearts, lives and actions - for now, as then, the Lamb is all the glory in Immanuel's land and He alone is worthy of our praise both now in time and when time ends for us we will see how worthy He is and be lost in wonder love and praise.

I pray that we would have foretastes of that in our church and lives as we go through our earthly life, as we meet and seek to worship our God in the beauty of holiness - as a church, as families and as individuals and that we would feel and know something of His glorious presence among us and then go on to tell others of how wonderful He is so that they too will join with us in praising the Lord Jesus for Calvary's pain and the love revealed and demonstrated there.