

Hallelujah! Praise and Prayer

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Watermark Community Church. Before you sit down, we turn around and greet somebody and welcome them to the house of the Lord. Okay, after you've greeted at least five people, you can sit down. I'm teasing.

Okay, how are you guys doing? Okay, just good? So-so? Hey, if you have been here at any time at all at Watermark, you know that we are on a journey.

We talk about being on a journey often. The Bible says that we're all on a journey to different destinations. We're all walking on a path, and we're all not there yet, but we're going someplace.

We've been reading the Gospel of Luke. We're in chapter 12. So if we were faster, we'd be in chapter 19, which is today. Today, Jesus is on a journey, and we've said that whenever he sets his face towards Jerusalem, that means one thing, right?

What does that mean? The cross. Very good. So that means the cross. So he's saying he's moving towards Jerusalem, and the cross is about bringing us back to God.

[1 : 11] And today, the passage tells us that when Jesus is walking into the village of Bethany, we're going to study about that later. That's where Lazarus is from. That's where he had the meal with the two sisters, Martha and Mary.

Remember the busy one and the one who wants to sit at his feet? He walks over the hill. So if you're in Jerusalem, you're in the middle of Jerusalem. You're looking north. To the east is this Kidron, this valley, and there's a Mount of Olives.

And about a mile over that Mount of Olives is the town of Bethany. And so Jesus is approaching Jerusalem, where he's going to get killed, with his disciples and thousands of people who are following him.

And we're told in this passage that when he comes over the hill, he's in Bethany. He looks down in Jerusalem, and he starts to cry. Because he realizes how much God loves the people in the city. And he realizes how far the people in the city's hearts are from God. And we're told that he weeps over lost people. We want to be a church that weeps over lost people and thinks about that and remembers what it was like before we knew Christ.

[2 : 17] And if you're here and you don't know Christ yet, we are so glad that you're here. And our prayer is that you would see him in the community and in the worship and in the word. And that you would come towards him and follow him.

So we're told that as Jesus looks over this city and he cries, everyone welcomes him because they're thinking that he's going to change everything right then. And so they come and they lay out all their clothes.

Thousands of people lay their clothes. And the hill is very steep and it goes downhill. And they put him on this young donkey, this donkey that's never been ridden before. To enter into Jerusalem to change and make all things new.

Now what happens is very interesting because the people gather around him and they have these palm branches. And tradition says that whenever a conqueror entered into a city for a thousand years, the people would line the city and wave these palm branches.

So everybody is waving these palm branches and they're crying out to Jesus, save us, save us. Now they have a different type of saving in mind.

[3 : 24] They are thinking about save us from the Romans, save us from our oppression. But as we know as followers of Christ, we know that his saving is much greater than that. So what I do now is I need the kids' help.

So if you're a kiddo, because we're about to dismiss you for kids' class, with all the kids who are like, you know, anybody who's going to run off there, can you come here for one second?

Come on, kids. We're going to try something. If you're new here, you know that we thrive in chaos. Okay. So. Hey. Okay. So this is what I need. All the kiddos here. Okay. So I need every kid to get a palm branch. Now you can sit there.

Okay. Grab one. Maybe. Christina, can you help me? Just take one. Just take one. Okay. Don't hit anybody. Don't hit anybody. Okay.

[4 : 22] There you go. We have. There you go. There you go. Okay. Just wait. Patience. Patience. Patience. Lucas. Okay. Okay. Everybody. Here you go, buddy. Okay.

Okay. So we have 50. I don't know. I can't see anything. I got all these trees around me. Okay. So kids, this is. Everybody have one? You want one?

Here you go. Rachel, can I have one more? Okay. Any more have one? Anybody else? Oh, we got some more over here. Come on. Walk on up. Okay. Here you go.

Okay. Everybody get one. Okay. Okay. Kids, watch me. This is what we're going to do. Okay. Hey. Okay. Ready? Wave the palm. Can you say, can you say Hosanna?

Hosanna. Louder. Hosanna. Hosanna. You know what Hosanna means? Hosanna means save us or come save us.

[5 : 23] Okay. So ready? You're going to help us. One, two, three. Hosanna. Oh, come on. No candy afterwards. Okay.

Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna. Okay. Now I want you to walk out of the house, walk out of the church, and wave your palm branch to everybody, and I want you to yell Hosanna as loud as you can.

Okay. Okay. Bye, guys. Also, youth.

Youth are dismissed. That Christians of all races and cultures and tribes know and utter. And those two words are hallelujah, which means praise the Lord, and amen or amen.

Amen. So today, we're going to think about prayer as praise. And I want us to begin this way. We shout out. Because when the Hebrews worship, they dance, they sing, and they shout.

[6 : 25] Just like when you go to see the Hong Kong Sevens, when you are cheering for your favorite team, whether it be Hong Kong or whether it be Fiji, whatever. You don't say, come on, Hong Kong. Come on, Fiji.

Come on, Hong Kong. Rise up, Fiji, and so on. So we're going to shout and praise God together. And then, after we have said hallelujah three times, we're going to read the scripture reading for today from Psalm 145, which you'll see on your screen.

We'll do it in three sections. First section will be there. The second section here. And the third section will be over there. And three of us will get you up and make sure that we read with enthusiasm, with vigor, with energy, and with joy.

Amen? Great. So, let's say, let's shout three hallelujahs to the Lord. Ready? Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! I will praise your name forever and ever.

Every day I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom.

[7 : 43] One generation commends your works to another. They tell of your mighty acts. They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty. And I will meditate on your wonderful works.

They tell the power of your awesome works. And I will proclaim your great deeds. They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate. The Lord is gracious and compassionate. Slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all. The Lord is good to all. He has compassion on all he has made.

All your works praise you, Lord. Your faithful people extol you. They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. And your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.

[8 : 51] The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. All right, you ready? Section 3. This is like the south sand in the 7th.

Ready? The Lord is righteous in all his ways and faithful in all he does. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him. He hears the cry and saves them. The Lord watches over all who love him. But all the wicked he will destroy. My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise his holy name forever and ever.

Amen. Please be seated. Good morning. It's great to be back at Watermark. Two nights ago, King Lee and I were invited to a wedding reception at the pier.

[9 : 55] And we had a tremendous surprise. Guess where we went? It was called the Watermark Restaurant. And I thought, wow, we must have grown.

The only disappointment was I didn't see Chef Tobin Miller there with his team. But there was tremendous service. And the fair was excellent.

So I thought, maybe here at Watermark, we can have the same kind of atmosphere, ambience. And at the same time, too, we want to have people who really serve, who care, that our service is efficient and personal.

And then, of course, to provide spiritual fare, give you a menu that will enrich you and bless you and help you come closer to know and love the living God.

Now, our theme for this morning is Hallelujah, Praise in Prayer. Prayer, they say, is a many splendid thing.

[10 : 54] So is love. But prayer is also like a diamond. Diamond, which is a precious stone, has many facets. And I want to suggest to you that the brightest beam would come from the facet of praise.

What is prayer? Most of us define prayer as talking to God, communicating with Him or communing with Him. And so when we find ourselves in danger, facing depression or difficulties, we cry to Him and say, help!

In His grace, He listens to us. He reaches out to us. And there are the times when we are praying for other people. Maybe our son or daughter is going through a tough time at school.

And they're having exams. My, there's so much fright and nervousness. So we begin to pray for our children or to pray for a loved one who may be going for a critical interview.

We call that intercessory prayer. And God delights often to hear those prayers. But then there are also sometimes prayers of thanksgiving. Maybe we've been promoted.

[12 : 06] Maybe we've had a fantastic vacation. And therefore, we want to say, thank you, Lord.

Thank you, Lord. But other times, when we have been convicted of our sinfulness, when our consciences smite us, we come to God and we say, God, we are truly sorry.

Then God in His grace forgives us. And someone says, it's the joy of being wrong. The joy of being wrong. When we say we are sorry, we know that God loves those with a humble and contrite heart. And He will forgive and He will restore. That's prayer. The prayer of confession. But when we praise God, our concentration, our focus is not on ourselves, our environment, or other people.

It is on the living God Himself. Prayer, as it were, raises us, lifts us up to see the God. The God who created the entire universe, the heavens and the earth.

The God who has revealed Himself. The God who wants us to know Him. And we begin to worship Him. Want to spend time with Him. Many years ago, I think it was in the year 1970, when our youngest son, Steve, was only about three years old.

[13 : 22] And I was working in my office preparing a sermon on a Saturday afternoon. That's when most pastors try to work on a sermon. And he came knocking at my door.

And I thought, oh, I must finish this message. Otherwise, I'll be very worried because tomorrow I have to preach that particular word. And I thought, well, Steve just simply wants me to wrestle with him.

Or to play with him. Play football with him. And I was preparing excuses as to why I can't spend time with him. Then I said, Steve, what do you really want?

And he says, Papa, Dad, I just want to be with you. And that melted my heart. All my excuses flew to the window. Just rush out to hug him.

Now, when we praise God, it's like that. God is saying, all right, I'll down all tools. I just want to be with you. And I'm so glad and delighted that you are enjoying me.

[14 : 23] So prayer is that way. And when we say hallelujah, we're saying praise the Lord. Now, our pastor, Tobin, is a fantastic reader in case you don't know much about him.

He would send to us staff members all kinds of wonderful articles. And recently, when we were in London, I had to read up something that he sent us from Tim Keller, a book that's not been published yet.

And Tim Keller, and some of us have been looking at his study guides, Gospel in Life, he was trying to distinguish between Christians who are driven by religion and those who are driven by the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

And so in this paper, he says, if you are driven by religion, this is what happens. My prayer life, quote, consists largely of petition.

It only heats up when I'm in a time of need. My purpose in prayer is to control the environment, things, and people. But on the other hand, if we are gospel-centered believers, then my prayer life consists of, and I love these words, generous stretches of praise and adoration.

[15:42] My main purpose is fellowship with Him. I seek God for Himself, not because I want Him to bless me, wonderful though that be, or to give things to me and to my friends.

It's not just needy, though we are and they are, but it's because when we praise, we enter into God's presence, we magnify Him, we lift Him up.

Now some of us are very familiar with a very famous catechism, the Westminster Shorter Catechism of Faith. And the question that's asked, the first question is, what is the chief purpose of man, the chief end of man?

Answer, the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. In a word, the reason why you and I exist, the reason why God saved us for Himself, is that in order that we can magnify Him, that we can praise Him, that we can enjoy Him forever.

Because praise is not just for Sunday worship, not even in a daily living, but it's for eternity.

Because when we go to heaven, heaven is a place full of praises.

[16:56] And right here on planet Earth, God wants us to praise Him. John Piper, some of us read his wonderful books, he calls himself a Christian hedonist, speaks of the enjoyment, the pleasure of knowing God.

And he says, worship is basically adoration. And we adore what delights us. And I like this phrase, this sentence.

There is no such thing as sad adoration or unhappy praise. So when we are praising God, we cannot be sad.

We might be sad in terms of our moods or our feelings, but once we start praising God, our perspective will change, change dramatically. And one of my prayers working here at Watermark is that our church will become a Hallelujah people community, that we will learn to praise God.

Because when we praise God, there is joy in our hearts, a smile on our faces, and many people will come and say, hey, what have you got that I haven't got? And when we praise God, we will be like a magnet drawing people to the living God himself.

[18:13] Now today we are going to look at a psalm. It is Psalm 145, which we have read earlier on. So turn with me to your Bibles or click. It is a new word I learned at Watermark.

Click to your iPad or iPhone to Psalm 145. This is a psalm of praise. The book of Psalms, the Psalter, has praise from the beginning and right through the very end.

And this psalm, Psalm 145, is an acrostic psalm. In other words, every verse begins with one letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Now alphabet is from the Greek word alpha-beta.

We call it alphabet. But this one you may call elefbeth. And the Jewish alphabet has 22 letters. So there are, as it were, 22 verses.

One was left out by the translators, the King James people, which I will point out to you later. And in these verses, we have the psalmist exhorting, encouraging people to praise God.

[19:23] And in the reading we had today, we have the three major points about praise. First of all, praise is eternal.

Praise is eternal. Verse 1, I will exalt you, my God the King, I will praise your name forever and ever. So from verse 1 through verse 7, we see that praise is eternal.

And the second verse says, every day, I will praise you and extol your name forever and ever. So there is this eternal dimension in praise.

Why? Because of God. Who is God? Verse 1, I will exalt you, I will lift you high, my God the King. God is no mere godling, small God.

He is the sovereign ruler of the universe. He is the majestic king. Now I live in London and Buckingham Palace is just about a mile and a quarter from where we live.

[20 : 32] But when you go and have an audience with the queen, you suddenly realize that you are coming before a person of tremendous dignity and honor. You can't just rush into her presence and say, hi there, queenie.

You can't do that. You must know how to address her. If you are a lady, to curtsy, which I can't do. Or a man, to say hi ma'am. Good, and so on. And so it is with God.

When we come into His presence, what do we do? Tell Him all our needs? Bring all our requests to Him? No, no. It begins with praise. I will praise your name forever and ever.

I will extol your name forever and ever. But praise is not just reserved for eternity when we get to the very courts of heaven. It's every day.

Every day. I will praise you. Will you turn to your neighbor and say, you have to praise God every day. Just turn to your neighbor and say that. Every day.

[21 : 36] Every day. I will praise you. We don't praise God simply when we come to a worship service. But every day, the different moments of our life, we really want to center on God.

We want to celebrate His worthiness. Yes, Lord. We just want to adore you. You are so great. You are so wonderful. So every day, we praise Him. And then the psalmist also realizes that he cannot live on earth forever.

The Hebrew idea was three score and ten years is sort of the maximum in those days. But he's saying, I want to see praise continuing.

How does it continue? And if you look at the fourth verse, it says, one generation will commend your works to another.

They will tell of your mighty acts. And in verse 3, because you are so great, so worthy of praise, what happens? I want to see every generation. This is the legacy that I'm passing on to my children, to my grandchildren, great-grandchildren, that every generation would know how to extol, exalt God Himself.

[22 : 50] One generation will commend your works to another. They will tell of your mighty acts. It is said by scholars that the Exodus event, when God rescued His people from Egypt, the parents were to tell them of God's mighty acts.

And someone, a theologian, called this the theology of recital. You recite, you rehearse, you talk of the mighty actions of God in history.

And so, we want to ensure that every generation knows about this great and mighty God and they will commend His works. Verse 5, they will speak of the glorious splendor of His majesty and that I will meditate on your wonderful works.

And this generation will go on telling of the power of your awesome works and I will proclaim your great deeds. And they will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.

Some of you know that Kingling and I are grandparents. we have 10 grandchildren. Now, of course, our three sons love Jesus and are very committed to Him.

[24 : 03] But to me, one of the most lovely experiences is to see our grandchildren praising God. This loving Jesus. And for us, it's a sheer delight because we want every generation to know and to practice and rehearse the praises of Almighty God Himself.

So, praise, is eternal. The second thing that we learn about praise is this. Praise is universal. Praise is universal.

And we find this from verse 8 through verse 13. Praise is universal. Verse 8 begins with a statement. Many years before that, Moses had an encounter, a rendezvous with God.

And then God revealed Himself to Moses. Moses was hiding in the cleft of a rock. And God declared that He is Yahweh, the Lord, loving and compassionate, will not be angry forever.

And here, the psalmist repeat that description of God Himself in that particular verse. Verse 8, the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

[25 : 31] His love is inexhaustible. The more you know of God's love in Christ Jesus, in creation, in redemption, you discover that we are worshipping a God who lavishes His kindness, His goodness towards us.

His love is rich. And because of that, what happens? Verse 9, the Lord, I want you to note the word all or every. The Lord is good to whom?

Just a few people? To an elite few? Not at all. He says, the Lord is good to all. His compassion is on all that He has made. Every creature, everyone is included. And all you have made will praise you, O Lord.

Your saints will extol you. Then in verse 21, my mouth would speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature, every, every creature praise His holy name forever and ever.

[26 : 40] And there you have the sense of praise being eternal and praise being universal, coming together. So, praise is universal.

Everyone, God is good to all. His compassion on all and all His works will praise Him. Every creature will praise His holy name. And earlier on, we've sung the lovely hymn ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi, all creatures of our God and King.

Lift up our voice and let us sing. Oh, praise Him. Oh, praise Him. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Then, Matt Redman's song, everything that, everything that has breath, praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Old hymns, new songs, center on God. There are songs, hymns, of praise to Him.

Or, in Psalm 98, the psalmist is very eager to show that when we praise God, not only human beings, not only those who profess to love Him, but all of nature resound, echo to His praise.

Verse 7 of Psalm 98, let the sea resound and everything in it, all the oceans, Atlantic, Pacific, Indian Ocean, South China Sea, resound.

[28 : 01] And the world and all who live in it, universal, the world, all who live in it, let the rivers clap their hands. We know rivers have no hands, but in this striking metaphor, even the rivers can rejoice and let the mountains sing together.

Let all the Himalayas, the Chains, the Andes, the Rockies, the Alps, every mountain range sing together for joy.

Let them sing before the Lord. So here we have praise as being universal because God made the whole universe and all His creation, both the redeemed and those whom He had created, including the world of the animals, the fish, the birds, and also nature itself with the trees and with the mountains and the seas, all are meant to praise God.

So praise is universal. And then as we go back to Psalm 45, the saints, verse 10, will extol you.

Who are the saints? They are God's chosen people. God would pick them out from the masses of the world and brought them to know Him, to love Him.

[29 : 20] And we who know and love God in Christ Jesus, we are the saints. And we are set apart to praise Him.

And what do we do? How do we praise God? Well, verse 11, they will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might so that all men may know your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Now, last week, Mike preached a wonderful sermon about kingdom and prayer. It talks about the reign of God, the rule of God. And here, we want to speak about the kingdom.

God's kingdom is not just a Jewish kingdom, not even a Christian kingdom, if I dare say that. It is a realm that extends throughout the world where people will come to confess that Jesus is Lord to God's glory.

They will accept His Lordship and His kingship. They will talk of His kingdom, the kingdom where Jesus is central, the kingdom with its values, the values of love, of forgiving our enemies, the values of acceptance, the value of even turning the other cheek, walking the second mile, they will speak of the glory of the kingdom and of His might so that, here's the universal theme again, all men and women may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

[30 : 51] So what God is doing is this, right in the created world, God calls out people, we are members of His kingdom, and in this kingdom, we demonstrate the goodness and the greatness of God and this kingdom is forever.

Your kingdom come, your will be done. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Get it? So there's this global, universal sense and this kingdom is supposed to permeate all of human life that people may come to know this great king, the king that we worship and love. So remember, our God is not a godling, a small God. He is the universal God. He has created the universe. He's Lord of the universe and we bow before Him in praise and in worship.

Praise is eternal. Praise is universal. And then thirdly, praise is experiential. You'll find this from verse 13, the second part, until the end of this particular psalm in verse 21.

Praise is experiential. God's mighty acts is not only etched in ancient history.

[32 : 21] It is engraved in everyday experience, both for the Christian as well as for the church. Because when we praise God, yeah, we can praise Him for all that is past, but we should be praising Him for all that is to come.

Now, in the church that I used to pastor in London, when we get people to give testimonies, I always say, no, I'm not interested, not now, in listening to the testimonies that you had 10, 15, 20 years ago of how you got saved and so on.

Wonderful though that may be, but I want to know what God has been doing for you personally in the last week, in the last month. And usually, my arbitrary selection is no more than three months because experiences ought to be fresh.

You heard a story about a man who loved to give his testimony and one day the pastor says, Bert, I want you to give your testimony at this meeting. He says, Pastor, I'm sorry.

My testimony had been eaten up by the rats. So what happened? He wrote his testimony down.

Every time he was asked to give his testimony, he would read it. Now, that's not the testimony we're talking about.

[33 : 38] It's fresh. It's alive. So what happens? Let's look at what the psalmist says. What are these things that we are to declare? It begins with the verse, verse 30, and this is the missing verse.

In some of your versions, if you have the King James, you find that it's not there. It's been left out. I think, not deliberately, but in some of the more ancient texts, including the Isaiah Scrolls, the oldest existing manuscript that we have, this verse is there.

The Lord is faithful to all His promises and loving towards all that He has made. This is a fantastic declaration statement.

God is faithful to all His promises and loving towards all that He has made. The God that we praise and worship is a totally trustworthy, reliable God.

Now, if you look at some of the gods, say, of Chinese people, of the Greeks or of the Indian people, you find that these gods are very capricious.

[34 : 47] So, on Chinese New Year or Chinese New Year Eve, in some Chinese homes, you know what the owner does? Maybe he's a businessman and he wants to prosper in the year to come.

He would go to the kitchen god or the door god and would rub their lips with cognac or whiskey and would say to them, when you see the august jade emperor, tell them I've been a good boy.

Okay? I've done things well and so on. It's kind of bribery. You want your god to change things?

This was true of the ancient gods that the Hebrews, the Jews met, especially in Canaan.

The Baals, the Baals, they were all so whimsical, always changing things and so on. They got to bribe them with all kinds of sacrifices but not our god because here we are told our god is absolutely consistent.

He will not break his word. And some of us know the pain of broken promises and pledges, words that were uttered when we exchange our marriage vows for better, for worse, richer, poorer, sickness, and health, to death, us do part and then comes the bitter divorce.

[36 : 05] And some of us find ourselves heartbroken because of broken promises and children who cannot trust parents' words, they grow up very traumatic and unable to cope with life.

I promise to take them to Disneyland or wherever and then some engagement crops up, sorry son, we can't go. promise is broken but God is not like that.

He is ever faithful, ever true, faithful in all his promises and then in relationship to us, loving towards all that he has made.

So how is this demonstrated? Verse 14, he is the god of grace or can I say the god of second chance or third chance or fourth chance and on and on.

he is that kind of god. Verse 14, the lord upholds all those who fall, he lifts up all those who are bowed down. Those who are oppressed and depressed, God lifts them up.

[37 : 11] Or like the servant of the lord, a bruised reed he will not break, a smoking flax he will not quench. See, for many of us, if someone let us down, beat our children, our colleagues, we get mad, especially if we have power, we'll say, forget it, you blew it, I'm not giving you another chance.

But God is not like that. You and I have sinned, we've offended God, grieved him. When we come back to him and we say sorry, he restores us, he lifts us up again, he longs for us to enjoy his fellowship and that is why we want to praise him.

The reason why I love God and praise him because he has given me so many chances. I blew it so many times. Sinned against him by my selfishness, by my hurtful words, by my unkind actions.

Many, many times. But God is so gracious. He just loves me and accepts me because as he looks at Jesus who died for all my sins on the cross, he says, I love you because you trust in my son. I accept you no matter what. So here's a God who lifts us up. Are you in depression today? Are you someone who is very downcast, things are going wrong, everything is so bleak and dark?

[38 : 38] Here's a word for you. The God we worship is the God who can uphold those who fall, who lifts up all those who are bowed down.

Now, some people say, you can only praise God when you're in a happy mood, happy feet, and so on. You can dance and so on and things are going well, then you can praise God.

But I want to suggest to you in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, God's people learn to praise God even in troubled times, in difficult situations. For example, when the apostles were beaten and flogged by the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews, what happened?

They had bleeding backs. Did they just quench and cry and say, oh, there's no point serving Jesus. Look at the beating that we've got.

In Acts chapter 5, we're told, they rejoiced and they counted it worthy to suffer for Christ. And then they had a marvelous prayer meeting with all the saints in Jerusalem.

[39 : 43] That's learning to praise God in times of trouble. Paul and Silas experienced that in the colony at Philippi in northern Greece. And when they were in that prison with their legs in the stocks and so on, what were they doing?

Were they complaining? God, how unfair. We serve you. Why are we here? We're told they sang in prison. There was so much joy they were praising God.

And when you start praising God, there will be earthquakes. There will be explosions. The whole thing changed and God even used them to lead the jailer and his family to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here in contemporary history, we know about the church in China. At one time, we thought it was going down. In 1951, there were only one million Protestants and all missionaries had to leave the country.

All foreign missionaries had to clear off. And some of us who were praying for China, we thought, oh dear, what's going to happen? Then, 1977, 78, when the curtain was opening, to our surprise, we learned that millions, at that time, the rough guess was about 40 to 45 million Christians were there, but we know there were much, much more.

[40 : 59] How did the church grow? the church grew because the people knew how to praise God in times of persecution. And I've read stories about, for example, a house church.

And one day, the Red Guards came along and they wanted to stop a Christian service. And they said, we're going to arrest the guy who was leading the worship. And they said, no, no, no, arrest the preacher.

He's the one who is telling people the message. And when they were being arrested, everybody said, yeah, we'll go, but don't arrest him, arrest me. The worship leader says, arrest me. The owner of the house said, arrest me, because this house belongs to me.

And everybody said, no, no, no, don't arrest them. We came to join the meeting, arrest me. So these police and the Red Guards didn't know what to do and they clapped everyone in prison. But when they got into prison, they began to sing songs of praise and began to testify to political prisoners and to lead them to Christ.

And then the authorities got so worried. They said, they're more dangerous inside than outside. Let's free them. You see, when you hear those stories, when people counted a joy to suffer for Christ and praise Him in troubled times, my goodness, there is a revolution.

[42 : 15] And God wants to see that happening even to us here today. Then let's move on. What else can we praise God for? For His provision. Verse 15, the eyes of all look to you, you give them their food at the proper time, you open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

Here in Hong Kong, most of us here have got good jobs, we can buy anything we like and God satisfies us, God provides for us, gives us this day our daily bread and He does.

Like the child, we will not worry about whether we'll have enough pancakes for tomorrow or whether we have to hoard up some pieces of bread. We don't do that because we know God will provide.

Then in His dealings with us, verse 17, the Lord is righteous in all His ways, loving towards all He has made. I can trust His God, I can praise His God because His intention is for my good.

He wills the best for me. And that's why I can rejoice, that's why I can praise Him. Hallelujah. Then it says, God is not a distant God, far, far away, so remote, so impersonal.

[43 : 43] When we call on Him in truth, He is there. And wonder of wonders, not just a foot, two feet away, by His Spirit He resides in me.

Don't you know that your bodies, says Paul, are the temples, the shrines of the Holy Spirit? So God is near, in us, with us, forever, so we can praise Him and rejoice in this wonderful, wonderful God. Then as we look on in our text, verse 19, He fulfills the desires of those who fear Him, He hears their cry and saves them. Verse 20, I think this is a verse for many of us today, especially those of us who live and work in Hong Kong.

the Lord watches over all who love Him, but the wicked He will destroy. I have to make a confession here.

I am a person who likes to be in control to know what's happening. Most pastors are like that, except Toby Miller, all right? and I get very anxious when I don't know what's going to happen and so on.

[44 : 57] And some of us who are pastors or executives, whatever it might be, heads of household, we can worry all night, what will happen to my child, what will happen to my business or to my church, to this activity, and then we become very anxious.

But the moment we learn to praise God, then our worries go. So we have a choice, either to acknowledge God and praise Him or to live with our worries.

The more you worry, it will eat into you and you become more anxious and you become more difficult to live with and work with. Ask your spouse, he or she will tell you that.

But when you start praising God, everything can change. Relationship and perspective. Now, in Psalm 1-1, there's a lovely picture of God watching over us.

Psalm 1-1, verse 3, God will not let your foot slip. He who watches you will not slumber. Are you having sleepless nights?

[46 : 06] Worrying about what will happen the next day, the next week, the next month? Hey, don't do that because there's no point in you having sleepless nights when God is the one who's keeping awake.

Remember, there's a story about God saying to the pastor, Pastor, you can go to bed now. Don't worry about your church. I'm here. I don't slumber. I don't sleep. I'm taking care of things. Just relax. Just sleep. And sometimes we need that word. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber, nor sleep. The Lord watches over you.

The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Whatever you do, He will watch, He will guard, He will protect you. And don't you want to shout, Hallelujah? Hallelujah? This is our God. The God who watches over us.

[47 : 13] And no wonder we have the response in verse 21. My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord. Let every creature praise His holy name forever and ever.

That is the natural response. And then you might say, hey, wait a minute, you've been teaching us from the Psalms, Psalm 145. It's great. What about the New Testament?

Well, let's meet Paul. Paul the Apostle who's gone through so much hardship and pain, persecution, imprisonment. And look at the way that he writes the Christians in Ephesus or the churches in Asia Minor because this is a circular letter.

Because in chapter 1 verse 3, he begins his letter with these words, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Praise. Hallelujah. God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing. The blessing of being chosen, election, predestination.

[48 : 21] What for? Verse 6, to the praise of His glorious grace. Then he goes on to talk about our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. And then in verse 13, he says, And you who are in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

So when we have the Holy Spirit living in us, God is saying, you are marked. You belong to Me. And nothing, nothing can separate you from My love.

Isn't that wonderful? And then he goes on to say, the Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of His glory.

So here, again, we are told that God gave His Spirit to us. It's like a deposit. Now, when you buy a house in Hong Kong, you have to give to the agent or to the vendor a certain percentage. you give a deposit. And that means that you are serious. You want to buy the house or else you lose the deposit. So in the same way, God is saying, how do you know that one day, because praise is forever, when you go to heaven, or how do you know that you'll be there?

[49 : 41] And the answer is, even right now, you have the Holy Spirit living in you. That's God's sign, God's seal, God's mark. Deposit. Now, in modern Greek, not in Koine, the Greek that was written of our New Testament text.

In modern Greek, the word for deposit is an engagement ring. The Holy Spirit is like an engagement ring. So those of you girls who are engaged or still have your engagement ring, what does that mean?

Boys, keep out. I belong to someone special, right? And engagement means a preview that one day the fulfillment of a relationship is going to take place.

Marriage. Then you have a wedding ring. Right? So God is saying to us, right now, you have the Holy Spirit. And therefore, you can shout, Hallelujah, because this is your guarantee.

This is your guarantee. So let's close. We're talking about Hallelujah. Praise in prayer. How do we apply this to ourselves? Well, we have to do certain things. One of the great preachers, leaders of the church in North America in the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards, he likes to use the word resolve.

[50 : 56] Resolve. So we have to resolve. Say, I am going to be intentional. I'm going to aim. I'm going to do it. I want to resolve to praise God every day. Personal praise.

So sometimes, now, I want this to kind of permeate in your mind, in your subconscious, and so on. When you ask yourself at any time in the day, hey, what am I supposed to do now?

I've just finished an assignment. What do I do next? I've just finished my meal. I've just put my kids to bed. What do I do now? Whenever you ask yourself what I do now, why not whisper utter praise? God, thank you. God, God, praise you for who you are, for loving me so much, for giving me all these wonderful things, and for dealing with me in your love, in your grace.

Hallelujah. I praise you. Do it. And prayer is something continuous. It's a continual conversation with God. So we learn to praise Him in every moment of our life, even when we say grace.

[51 : 57] That's a time of thanksgiving, of praise to Him. Praise Him when we read the Scriptures. Praise Him aloud. Praise Him as we join others in songs. And those of us in our cell groups, when we meet, when we have our time a prayer, don't just bring needs to God.

Of course we can. But begin with praise. Short praises. Don't pray long prayers. I'm never happy with long prayers. I go to sleep if you pray too long. I just like, you know, short prayers, one sentence, two sentences.

And when we have morning prayers here, we try to restrict it to no more than two sentences. And that's great. Everybody can participate. And when you praise God, the Bible study goes much, much better.

And then we want to say this, that when we praise God, we want our whole life to express our joy and gratitude to Him. One of the great Scottish pastors, Horatius Bonner, he wrote a hymn which I love.

I sing together with my wife over and over again. Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise, that my whole being may proclaim thy being and thy ways.

[53 : 10] Then he goes on to say, not for the lips of praise alone, not in the praising heart. I ask but for a life made up of praise in every part.

I ask for a life made up of praise in every part. Amen. So why don't we just praise God? Let's all stand together.

And again, just to say, yes Lord, I want to praise you. Can we shout again, hallelujah to the Lord? Because this is saying, I'm praising you. And then we'll sing closing him.

So let's really praise God again. You heard His word. He's asked us to praise Him because praise is eternal, praise is universal, and praise is also experiential. So let's, with all our heart, all our might, all our volume, praise God in three hallelujahs.

Ready? Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Amen.