

Psalm 113

Read Psalm 113:1-6: We are to praise God in all times and in all places. How can we praise God from the sunrise until the sunset? How can we glorify him above all of the nations? It begins with recognition and reflection. There are things happening all around us that should produce an appreciation for God. God is paying attention to what is happening on earth, and in my life.

One observation is that our ways are not God's ways.

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts. (isaiah 55:8)*

We might spend a little more time, talent and treasure to invest in the world's system to obtain a better life. Our flesh is geared towards an effort-based result. That is a mirage. Frequently the world just takes away, without providing anything of value. God offers another way; in which he does the heavy lifting. God has always prescribed the idea of *building margin in our lives*. Be merciful to others in our dealings. Take a day off of work. Shut things down periodically. We are on a treadmill that only takes; and does not give back. It seems counter-intuitive to share and be merciful and invest in others. God teaches us how to give away money and time in order to *break this bondage*; and re-establish healthy margins in our own lives.

The curses upon this world are also designed to break our love for the things that we pursue. We might make great sacrifices to obtain until we become disillusioned. It requires trust to expect God to provide for us. If we won't willingly re-start our lives God will clear off our schedule by force. Satan desires to destroy us. At the same time, God is pushing us back to a sustainable life.

I took a quick scan of the world headlines this morning to see what we could attribute to God's grace across the world. Many of the dark and fearful things have their limitations and durations. The dark forces of evil want to interrupt our excitement and praise with fear and doubt. To introduce doubt is to put our praises on hold.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of

the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die. ' " (Genesis 3:1-3)

Amidst the storms God is keeping his promises; and working for good. Here are today's headlines. Can you separate the good from the evil?

- Hurricane Ian is over. It appears to have caused 103 deaths and a lot of property damage; but it could have been so much worse.
- Ukraine has pushed Russian forces backwards to such a degree that Russia had to call up 300,000 national guard troops.
- There are 33,834 known North Korean defectors who are beginning to expose the atrocities in that country.
- There are currently protests in 46 Iranian cities over the death of a 22 year old woman abused by the police.

There are two plays taking place in one theater. One play is about mankind failing badly. We have been peeing in our own drinking water for a long time. The other play is about God being in total control over all things in heaven and earth. What filter am I seeing everything around me? Faith is a transfer of trust. Is the world going to hell in a handbasket? Is our society going over the waterfall of eternity into oblivion? God has allowed opposition to his people. There are limits to these forces; just like there are limits to the waves that break on the beach. They rise up to threaten us; but they always fall in a prescribed place. Like the crashing waves, Sagan never wins. He is allowed to nag, destroy and lie; but God's will is ultimately met directly or indirectly. God always wins.

When I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, And here your proud waves must stop!' (Job 38:11)

There are things that show up and threaten our plans and hopes and dreams every day. Do we lose our composure and conclude that we will suffer a loss? Do we see past these things; because God has delivered us from so many similar things before? If God is driving, don't take the wheel out of his hand.

Read Psalm 113: 7-9: It is very hard to be pinned down by life's circumstances. That is compelling to root for the underdog. There is something in us that responds to seeing a person's fate improve. This psalmist may be quoting others; or he may just have a similar

observation. I can recall being down in circumstances, and having hope that somehow God will make things work out. And he did.

How could God be glorified unless my position is inexplicably improved? Hannah was the underdog, and she said something similar. She was unable to bear a son; and fulfill her contribution to the family. God answered her prayer and gave her baby Samuel.

The Lord makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up. He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory. (1 Samuel 2:7-8)

Trusting in God implicitly takes away the dread of our losses; as we conclude that God will use some other means to bless us. Abraham's most-prized possession was his long-awaited son. God asked to let him go. How could any father do that?

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, (Hebrews 11:17-19)

What should we fear; and what should we embrace? What if God allows me to lose all of my savings? What if I lose my job? What if my health fails? Is all hope lost? Not at all! If something is taken away from me it will ultimately bless me. Otherwise we will be desperate to clutch onto things that are slipping through our fingers.

Example #1: I had a good job with a construction company for 14 years. I did not get along with the east coast Vice President of Construction, and he pulled some strings to get rid of me. I was upset that I was being chased out for doing the right thing; and not kowtowing to his abuse of authority. This was actually an answered prayer. I had been praying to find a way to move on to another company without showing a lack of appreciation for what the owner had done for me and my family. In addition, the job I received was better.

Example #2: I was building a citrus growing and packing enterprise over many years. It seemed like every effort to grow was met with difficulty. I had semi tractor loads of fruit come in that were not packable. The shed was built without a budget by myself and a friend. I had a packing shed construction worker run over himself with a forklift; and

sued me. I had pulled together some under-maintained groves that I transitioned into 5 certified organic groves, with changed out irrigation systems and considerable pruning efforts (big investment of time and money). The irrigation district took away my grove water allocations; and then the Witch Creek Fire burned down my packing shed. The uphill battle resulted in having a huge debt with little repayment capacity. We almost lost our home four times in one year. The debt collectors were dogging us day and night. This all forced me to accept an offer to take on a day job in construction. 17 years later, I am happy to be working in construction. My citrus enterprise continues on an easier-to-mange basis.

Example #3: I had a multi-million dollar cattle feed partnership in the Imperial Valley. My working relationship with my partner was difficult. He was very insecure about my relationship with his growers. We also started a Mexican company to handle our import-export activities. Our Mexican partner failed to make a \$24,000 cash collection on a rail car of wheat seed in Mexicali. I closed down the Mexican and American company over time. My American partner made it very difficult to fairly dispose of our assets and close things down. Regardless, the result was that my partner was saved, and his extended family; and I went back to working locally.

Can I praise God in the down cycle when things are uncomfortable? Can I be thankful before it is all obvious that there is a blessing involved? This world essentially owns me if my happiness is tied to any outcomes down here. I can hang onto things more loosely if my hopes and dreams and expectations lie with God.

I had a good conversation with one of our project managers this week. He was very stressed over a huge east coast roofing job of an occupied military hospital that has been dogged with subcontractor labor availability, material availability, joint venture and sub-tier infighting, workmanship issues, very unpredictable and frequent year-around rain, etc.... He was the recipient of a lot of anger from the principals and company leadership. Fortunately God sent us a stellar sub-tier foreman who has turned that job around miraculously. I told the PM that he needed to put this thing in God's hands and let him drive. The stress he was carrying is self-evident that he cannot continue to carry this burden. He walked into my office with the look of relief and told me that he put it in God's hands and he felt an immediate relief.

