

Working For His Weak Friends

Psalm 111 May 8, 2024

In 1982, Canadian rock band *Loverboy* made a bold claim: Everybody's working for the weekend. Not Dashrath Manjhi. He was working for a much different reason. He gave himself a project: carve a path through a mountain ridge in eastern India. This little road would be just 360 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 25 feet deep, *but* it would shorten the distance from his village to basic facilities - *like a doctor* - by 70%. Dashrath hewed his path using hand tools - hammer and chisels.¹

It took him 22 years to finish his little road. The job was done in 1982, the same year everyone else was working for the weekend. *Why* did Dashrath do it? Because in 1959, his wife was injured when she slipped and fell on that ridge, while bringing his lunch one day. That same mountain stood in the way, keeping them from getting to a doctor before she died from her injuries.

Dashrath has been called the hardest working person ever. But, that's not even close to true. The hardest working Person has worked for way more than 22 years and He doesn't stop for lunch or sleep or vacations. He didn't carve one 360 foot long road, but the life paths for each of the billions and billions of people who have ever lived on planet earth. Yahweh, the God of the Bible, has worked, is working, and will still work for all of human history in every place on planet earth.

Psalm 111 is a song of praise that reminds us to think about God's work and shows us how considering the acts of God fuels our worship and a deeper spiritual life.

Psalm 111:1 - ¹ Hallelujah! I will praise the Lord with all my heart in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.

Hallelujah is a *plural* mandate - a group command. *Everybody* needs to praise the Lord. But then he goes immediately to his own, *personal* commitment.² *I* will praise the Lord with all *my* heart.

We're all called into relationship with God. We're all invited to be a part of the work that this Psalm talks about. But at the end of the day, I can't help it if the person next to me doesn't want to participate. *My part* is my part. What is the attitude of *my* heart? What's going on in *my* mind?

His commitment is challenging: I will praise the Lord with *all* my heart. Of course, we know that this is the greatest and most important commandment, right? Not to just give lip service to God, but to *love* the Lord with *all* our heart, all our soul, all our mind. To devote it all to Him.

Our heart is the size of a fist, but we can store an awful lot in it, can't we? If I pause for a moment and start thinking about all the things going on in my heart - the desires, the concerns, the plans, the hurts, the hopes, the distractions, a lot fills that space. The psalmist says, "I'm going to praise

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dashrath_Manjhi

² John Goldingay *Psalms: Volume 3*

the Lord with *all my heart*. I'm going to fill up my thoughts and attention and expectation and concern only with the Lord in this moment." That's a high bar.

He invites us to praise in the assembly and in the congregation. The first group is smaller, like a circle of friends. The second is a larger group.³ He's determined to praise God on his own and with his friends and in larger settings. And he invites everyone else to join him in this purpose.

Have you seen the videos of people at these Anti-Israel protests being asked why they're there and what they're marching for and they don't know? The psalmist has clear purpose: I'm going to praise, we should get together and praise. Why? Because...

Psalm 111:2 - ²The Lord's works are great, studied by all who delight in them.

We don't praise because we *have* to. Yes, we're commanded to praise, but it's not like the pagan gods where if you don't appease them, they'll come and wipe out your crops. We worship God because He *works* and the more we understand His works, the more delighted we will be and inspired to proclaim His greatness. Because the things He does really matter.

Have you seen some of these "world records" people hold? Longest fingernails. Largest collection of rubber ducks. Longest time balancing on one foot in high heels. Those are feats, I guess. But they don't *matter*. God's works are *great*, meaning they are of amazing value and importance.⁴

Verse 2 refers both to the *deeds* of God *and* the things He *makes*.⁵ Miracles *and* mountains. It's not just the things God has *done*, but what He is still *doing*. His ongoing providential acts.⁶

Daniel Estes writes, "*Praise is nurtured by contemplating what the Lord does.*"⁷ He continues, "*As the people of the Lord see the world more carefully, they are led to praise the Lord; and as they praise the Lord, they are prompted to see the world more clearly.*"

Psalm 111:3 - ³All that he does is splendid and majestic; his righteousness endures forever.

Has your favorite musician ever put out an album you didn't like? A dud after all those hits? Did your favorite team finally win the championship only to get knocked out of the playoffs the next year? No duds when it comes to God's work. *All* He does is splendid and majestic.

People love to ask "Why doesn't God..." Psalm 111 encourages us to ask, "What *has* God done? What *is* God doing?" If we investigate those questions we will discover that God is good and He is always victorious and that the *point* of His work is to help *us*. To rescue and redeem. Perhaps it's time for us to think of ways to incorporate talking about what God is doing more in our lives.

³ Derek Kidner *Psalms 73-150*

⁴ *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

⁵ Kidner

⁶ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown *Commentary Critical And Explanatory On The Whole Bible*

⁷ Daniel Estes *Psalm 73-150: An Exegetical And Theological Exposition Of Holy Scripture*

Psalm 111:4 - ⁴He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered. The Lord is gracious and compassionate.

God *really* wants us to know about what He's doing. It's not for *His* benefit, it's for *our* benefit. Our discovery of what He has done for us is our only hope. Romans 10: "How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about Him?"⁸

God does all this work, this work of grace to rescue people from death, but He can't rescue them unless they respond to His offer, which means they need to *hear* about His offer. So, He has caused His works to be remembered. The word remembered is a noun which means proclamation.⁹

God says, "Remember Me. Remember what I've done." Psalm 78 says that in the wilderness God's people, "did not remember His power on the day He redeemed them." And the result was they rebelled against God and broke His heart.¹⁰ Same thing in the time of the Judges.

Psalm 106:7 says, "*Our ancestors in Egypt did not grasp the significance of your wondrous works or remember your many acts of faithful love; instead, they rebelled by the sea.*"

When God's people fail to remember, the result is drift and rebellion and ruin.

It's not just the people of Israel who need to remember the acts of God. What did Jesus say when He gave us the Lord's Supper? "Do this in remembrance of Me." *Remember* His work of grace and compassion. Remember His faithfulness and His promises and His accomplishments for you.

Tonight on your drive home you might think through your life. What are some of the acts of redemption God worked on your behalf? Some moment when you should've died, or should've been arrested, or been found out for something you did. A moment when you should've lost everything or received what you didn't deserve. We can't possibly know *all* the things God does for us, but as we consider His work just for us, it will have a great spiritual effect.

Psalm 111:5 - ⁵He has provided food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.

Does this mean that no Christian will ever go hungry? Obviously not. Paul said, "I've often been hungry and thirsty without food."¹¹

In the *old* covenant, God made physical promises to Israel. He said, "Obey Me, and you'll never be sick, you'll always have huge harvests," all these physical guarantees. But, prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel let us know that a *new* covenant was coming, one that deals with the heart and the

⁸ Romans 10:14

⁹ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 5: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*

¹⁰ Psalm 78:40-42

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 11:27

spirit. The book of Hebrews calls it a “better covenant” with “better promises.” This new covenant was mediated by Jesus Christ when He poured out His blood for us. And *now* we don’t settle for living by bread alone, but on every word that comes from God. God *has* provided food for us - the Bread of Life. If we eat of it, we will live forever. Our blessings are higher than the temporal.

Psalm 111:6 - ⁶He has shown his people the power of his works by giving them the inheritance of the nations.

Sometimes skeptics criticize Christians by saying, “You think you have the corner on truth.” The truth is, God *does* share special revelation with His people, but we’re not trying to keep it from anyone. God has made space for *anyone* to come in if they are willing. Come, be a part of His family, receive the full revelation of Who He is and what He’s done. Come be set free by the truth!

Meanwhile, one of His great works is to give His people special inheritance. *This* world is not our home, but the *New* earth will belong to us. Ethnic Israel also has a promised land inheritance. What the world calls “Palestine” belongs to the Jews. In fact, *way more* than the territory they currently have is theirs by covenant. So, while the nations quibble and rage over the west bank, we know that God will keep His promise and the descendants of Abraham *will* receive their land in full one day.

Psalm 111:7 - ⁷The works of his hands are truth and justice; all his instructions are trustworthy.

I love this because it depicts God as being hands-on in this work. He doesn’t hire out the hard stuff. *He* does it with His own hands. And *while* He’s working, He’s teaching.

It is important to God that we understand the truth. He wants us to know *so that* we can have a close relationship with Him and so that we can go His way and be in line with His work so that our lives can be blessed and grow and we can get where He wants us to be.

In Jeremiah 6 the Lord says, “I’m instructing you so that you know the *good* way to go so that you’ll take it and find *rest*.”¹² That’s His desire for us. That we not only recognize His work, but recognize that His works work in our lives.

Psalm 111:8 - ⁸They are established forever and ever, enacted in truth and in uprightness.

We’ve had great leaders in our country who did some significant things. But then their time passes. New leadership comes into power and often undoes what the last guy did. Today, our government is defined by gridlock and in-fighting and ineffectiveness.

The Lord’s ways are established *forever*. There’s no time, no place where they don’t work. There’s no situation where we look back and think, “Oh, God didn’t really know what He was talking about.”

¹²Jeremiah 6:16

There are Supreme Court decisions that *everyone* looks back on in agreement as *bad* decisions. Not so with the Lord. All His ways are true and good and upright and consistent.

Psalm 111:9 - ⁹He has sent redemption to his people. He has ordained his covenant forever. His name is holy and awe-inspiring.

Why does God do all the things He does? Of all the things He *could* be doing, why hang in there with humanity? Why bother trying to fix something that is *this* broken? It's a *lot* of work!

In 1924, when George Mallory was trying for the third time to reach the top of Mount Everest, someone asked him why he was doing it. His famous answer was, "Because it is there." Mallory and his partner died on that trip. Makes you wonder if that was reason enough.

God does what He does for *you!* He does it because *you* need saving and He is a Savior. He is the Redeemer, spending His days at sin's slave market, offering to buy every single suffering soul who is trapped in guilt and shame and held captive by the devil.

He says, "*I* have ordained this covenant forever." He has put Himself on the hook to do all the things He's promised in His Word. He's not like these politicians who make hundreds of promises but don't even keep half of them. He *does* what He says.

Psalm 111:10 - ¹⁰The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his instructions have good insight. His praise endures forever.

If a person fears God, that means they believe He exists and they take Him seriously and they will want to understand Him more and they'll be listening to what He says and conforming their lives to what He asks. That process will lead that person to consider the works that He does, which then prompts that person to praise and then we're back at verse 1 and it starts all over again in this wonderful loop of worship.

In fact, the word praise there at the very end is a derivative of the word hallelujah that we read at the top.¹³ So we end where we began, only we know God even more. We've thought of Him again. We've reminded ourselves of His power and grace toward us and how He's *still* working because we *still* need His saving. And it is His delight to do things so that we can be delighted in Him. And that delight should leak out in worship.

Here we are, in the assembly of the upright. We have set aside a few more minutes to praise our Lord. To remind ourselves of Who He is and what He's done and what He's promised. His power, His grace, His goodness. We get to lift up an offering of adoration and thanksgiving to this all-powerful God of grace, Who loved us first, Who remembers us. What an opportunity we have. Psalm 33 says praise from the upright is *beautiful*. So let's do what we came to do.

¹³ C. Hassell Bullock *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalm 73-150*