

## Remember what Makes a Hallelujah

### Psalm 111 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. <sup>2</sup> Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. <sup>3</sup> Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. <sup>4</sup> He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate. <sup>5</sup> He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever. <sup>6</sup> He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations. <sup>7</sup> The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. <sup>8</sup> They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness and uprightness. <sup>9</sup> He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever— holy and awesome is his name. <sup>10</sup> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

“Praise the LORD!” (verse 1a) That phrase is just a singular word in the original Hebrew language, and that word is transliterated to “Hallelujah.” It’s found its way to stay relevant in our English language. Maybe you use it to imitate a charismatic preacher (because us Lutherans tend to be more subdued and aren’t shouting our Hallelujahs...). Maybe we more commonly use the Greek transliteration “Alleluia” on Easter as we repeat the phrase, “Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia!” Maybe a Hallelujah rolls off your lips when something that has been causing you so much stress and care and concern is finally answered and resolved. For myself, I quietly say, “Thank you, God. Hallelujah!” when someone comes to worship after meeting with them or emailing with them or when someone joins us for worship after being absent for a long time. These are the times when we say, “Hallelujah!” “Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.” (verse 1)

Maybe even as I go through all of those examples and you’re hearing “Hallelujah,” you’re thinking, “Bah humbug.” Thinking about the conversations that I’ve had with people lately, I hear a lot of tiredness and brokenness. For some, maybe all of us, the never silenced alarm blaring for COVID has stressed us out and it just keeps going, then there’s a light at the end of the tunnel, and then things get worse again and the light goes away. We don’t know when it will end. We don’t know if we will get sick. We want to make the best decisions that keep people healthy and safe, but what are they? Do we ignore the alarm? Are we so exhausted from it that we stop caring? But that’s not right either.

What about other stressors? Are we so maxed out with what we need to care about and what we are told to care about that we can’t add one more thing? And because people are so maxed out with their own stress, has no one reached out to you to see how you are doing? You don’t want to ask people to care about you, to check in on you, because you’d probably answer that it’s all fine anyway. You don’t have the energy to devote even in sharing what you’re wrestling with. Everyone is practicing self-care, dealing with their struggles. We don’t want to add to them. So we don’t ask. We go right back to where we were last week, trusting in ourselves to get through troubling times. We feel like no one cares.

So many people are struggling. You’re struggling. I’m struggling. We want to be happy, but it’s eluding us. We try to take more time for self-care only to continue to be exhausted. We try to limit activities and responsibilities to either be dragged unwillingly into more and you feel you have to suck it up and keep going and you really start to feel the burnout or you drop more and more things and become more and more isolated. We feel much more “Bah humbug” than “Hallelujah!”

If you’re having a hard time thinking of when you would say or sing or shout, “Hallelujah!”, then Psalm 111 was written for you. Why does the author sing a Hallelujah? Because “great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them.” (verse 2) Hallelujahs come from pondering the great works of the LORD.

“He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.” (verses 4-5) For the Israelites, they remembered that God had powerfully provided the manna and quail and water in the desert. The Jews of Jesus’ day would have remembered that he gave them all the bread and fish they could eat. Since God provides seed for the sower, sunshine and rainfall, seasons and harvest time, bread for food, we have reasons for a “Hallelujah” to form on our lips when we look at our food and remember that God has given these things to us. If you open up your refrigerator or your cupboards and there’s food in there, Hallelujah! If you can afford to get Door Dash or grab take out, Hallelujah! If you look in your closet or your dresser and you have more than the clothes you’re wearing, Hallelujah! Even if you just have the clothes you have on you, Hallelujah! If you have a car that gets you from point A to point B, a roof over your head, Hallelujah! Praise the LORD! Why? Because he has given us all these things. He is the giver of every good and perfect gift. We would have none of these things if it weren’t for him.

What else do we remember to make a Hallelujah? God “provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever— holy and awesome is his name.” (verse 9) The word redemption means to pay a price for someone to free them from captivity. The Israelites would immediately remember that they were slaves to the Egyptians for hundreds of years. It was God’s great power and might that paid the cost for them to be freed through a series of ten powerful signs. One of the costs for these signs was measured in the blood of the Passover Lamb. This animal was sacrificed to pay for the lives of the people in the household, its blood being spread over their door frames, saving them from death. They would remember this, not just when they had the festival commemorating the event, but every day as they continued to offer sacrifice after sacrifice. Remembering what God had done to provide redemption made a Hallelujah form on their lips.

We too were slaves. When we were conceived, we were conceived in sin. We inherited imperfection from our parents. Although we were physically alive, we were spiritually dead, held captive to sin. We were only ever hostile to God. “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin,” God says. (John 8:34) The chains of sin tried to drag us down to the depths of hell and keep us there forever, make us feel as if there was no way out. The only key to releasing us from the slavery to sin is a perfect life. None of us have achieved it. None of us can. You can give us all the time ever, all eternity, and it wouldn’t make any difference because we would never be perfect. Just one sin makes us a slave to sin. Just one sin is like a pin to a balloon. It pops the balloon, and it can never hold air again. We could never free ourselves from our slavery to sin because we have all sinned, all been imperfect.

The day that sin entered the world, God immediately announced his one-sided covenant, his one-sided promise that he would pay the full price to redeem us, to free us from the captivity of sin, without ever taking any repayment. The price was himself. He paid the price that was needed to free us from sin by living perfectly every second of every day for us. After 33 years of perfect living, always obeying God, never failing at a single point, he then sacrificed his life like the Passover lamb. He substituted himself for us. “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

This may not make sense, that God would give up his life to fix the problems of sin that we created. It’s not a plan that we would come up with. However, as it is written: “What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived” — the things God has prepared for those who love him. (1 Corinthians 2:9) This is what God did. This is what you and I have. We have the lifeblood of Jesus Christ, that perfect Lamb of God, paid for us. We have been freed from the captivity and slavery of sin. His life released us from it. We are not bound to sin any longer. We are made new. We are heirs of heaven. We have all eternity still to come when we will get to live with God.

A time is coming for all of us tired and broken people, a time when all this brokenness of this world, all the sickness, all the worries, all the concerns, all the heartaches, all the depression, all the temptations, all the things that make you say, “Bah humbug,” will come to an end. Since Christ provided redemption for us by his precious blood, we are free from our slavery to sin and have that perfect future with him in heaven that will never be tarnished, broken, or taken from you. Remembering this makes a Hallelujah form on our lips!

In God’s great wisdom, he provided everything for our redemption. He paid the price, and so we are free from the slavery of sin! “The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.” (verses 7-8) Remember this truth because it makes us say and shout, “Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!” Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Hallelujah! Amen.