

August 31, 2014 by Steve Brandon



# Transcendent and Immanent

## Psalm 113

1. Praise the LORD (verses 1-3).
2. He is High and Exalted (verses 4-6).
3. He Helps the Humble (verses 7-9).

Ever since Moses brought the Jews out of slavery in Egypt, the Jews have celebrated the Passover every spring to commemorate the occasion. Now, the exact way that they celebrate it is varied. But, it usually includes some type of reading of the story of the Exodus. And, it often includes some reading from six Psalms, known as the Egyptian Hallel, Psalms 113-118.

It is our privilege this morning to look at the first of the Egyptian Psalms: Psalm 113. For the past few weeks, we have been looking at Psalms that are much like Psalm 113. They have begun with praise. And they have ended with praise.

Remember Psalm 103? It began with the call in verse 1, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name" (Psalm 103:1). It ended with the similar, "Bless the LORD, O my soul" (Psalm 103:22).

Remember Psalm 105? It began with the call to give thanks, "Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name" (Psalm 105:1). It ends with, "Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 105:45).

Remember Psalm 106? It begins with a call to praise, "Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 106:1). It ends with, "Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 106:48).

You could also throw Psalm 104 into the mix as well. I preached on this Psalm a few years ago. It begins with a call to praise in verse 1, "Bless the LORD, O my soul!" (Psalm 104:1). It ends with, "Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 104:56).

Our Psalm this morning is similar. It begins with praise, "Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 113:1). It ends with praise, "Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 113:9). Perhaps you could call these, "sandwich Psalms." Bread on the outside, and meat in the middle. And in every case, the meat is the reason for the bread. In other words, the call to praise is always backed up with some good reasons why.

In Psalm 103, it was the blessings that God has given to us. In Psalm 104, it is the wonders of His creation. In Psalm 105, it is the faithfulness of God. In Psalm 106, it is the compassion of God. And now, here in Psalm 113, it is the care of God. Though He is high and lofty and exalted, He still cares for us.

In other words, Our God is no indifferent deity who sits on his throne in heaven, oblivious to everything that is taking place here on earth and not caring for His people. No, on the contrary. Though God is high and lofty and exalted, and He not only knows what's going on in our lives, but He cares enough to help us in our distress.

This past week at Kids KLUB, I had one of the children who attends as me, "Pastor Steve, are Zeus and Thor real?" And I answered this precious child, "No." She said, "My uncle say that they are real." And I again affirmed to her that they weren't real. She seemed to be disappointed with that fact. Such is the view of God that many of these children have. Well, it just so happened that day that one of the stories that we were reading in our Gospel Story Bible was the story about Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

If you remember that story, you remember that Elijah put the prophets of Baal to the test. He said, "Let us set up two altars, with wood on the altar. Let us place an ox on each altar, but put no fire on the altar. Let us call to our God and see if He answers by fire." Soon after the altars were set up, the prophets of Baal soon began to call out to Baal, begging that fire would come upon the altar. They called out to Baal from morning until evening. Nothing happened, as we know Baal is not real, just as Zeus and Thor are not real.

Then it was Elijah's turn. He first dug a trench around the altar. He then ordered the altar to be drenched three times with water. So much water was upon the altar that the trench was filled with water. He then prayed to the LORD. "O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known this day that you are God in Israel. ... Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back" (1 Kings 18:36, 37). And fire came down from heaven and devoured the drenched ox upon the altar. And the prophets of Baal knew that Yahweh was God!

Why? Because He knew what was happening on earth. He knew that Elijah was in trouble, with 850 prophets of Baal against him. And He answered Elijah's prayer. He answered with power, because the LORD is a great God. He answered because the LORD is a good God.

Well, let's read our Psalm together.

Psalm 113  
Praise the LORD!  
Praise, O servants of the LORD,

Praise the name of the LORD.  
Blessed be the name of the LORD  
From this time forth and forever.  
From the rising of the sun to its setting  
The name of the LORD is to be praised.  
The LORD is high above all nations;  
His glory is above the heavens.

Who is like the LORD our God,  
Who is enthroned on high,  
Who humbles Himself to behold  
The things that are in heaven and in the earth?  
He raises the poor from the dust  
And lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
To make them sit with princes,  
With the princes of His people.  
He makes the barren woman abide in the house  
As a joyful mother of children.  
Praise the LORD!

This Psalm breaks down thematically into three sections. Each of the sections have three verses. So, my first point covers verses 1-3. It is a call to ...

### 1. Praise the LORD (verses 1-3).

Notice how many times in the first three verses we are called to praise the LORD.

Psalm 113:1-3  
Praise the LORD!  
Praise, O servants of the LORD,  
Praise the name of the LORD.  
Blessed be the name of the LORD  
From this time forth and forever.  
From the rising of the sun to its setting  
The name of the LORD is to be praised.

I count five times! Three times in the first verse, "praise, praise, praise." Once in verse 2, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." Once in verse 3, "The name of the LORD is to be praised." Notice how three times we see "the name" of the LORD mentioned. I point this out simply to say that often the "name" of the LORD is used poetically in place of the LORD! To praise His name is to praise Him!

And God is to be praised at all times and in all places. All times, verse 2 says, "from this time forth and forever." Today, and onwards, we are to praise His name. All places, says verse 3, "from the rising of the sun to its setting." The rising is in the east. The setting is in the west. It matters not whether you live on the east coast or the Middle East, God's name is to be praised. It matters not whether you live on the west coast or in the West Indies, God's name is to be praised. Everywhere, we are to praise His name.

And so, I ask you, "How are you doing?" Are you one who praises the name of the LORD? Always and in every place? Know this: This is God's expectation for your life! That is, if you are His servant. Look again there at verse 1, "Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD, Praise the name of the LORD." Do you see who is addressed in this verse? It is addressed to His servants.

This is a call for all who would profess to serve the LORD to praise the LORD. Are you His servant? Then, there ought to be no doubt as to what God is calling you to do this morning. He is calling you to praise the LORD.

Now, of course, this will take place in many different ways. It must, if we are to praise the LORD at all times (verse 2) and in all places (verse 3). It means that wherever we are, we ought to be praising the LORD. Thus, we ought to be worshipping the LORD

It can take place in singing! It can take place in speaking of His glory to another. It can take place when walking or driving or reading or running. It can take place overlooking the Grand Canyon with a sigh, what a great God we serve! It can take place when reading a biology book. What an amazing God who put life together so that it works this way. It can take place when we are working to the glory of God. But, God calls us to praise His name through whatever we are doing.

I fear that too often, we aren't thinking about this. We are simply going about our day as practical atheists, living as if God doesn't even exist.

Let's move on to my second point. First, Praise the LORD (verses 1-3). Second, ...

### 2. He is High and Exalted (verses 4-6).

That's the point of verses 4-6.

Psalm 113:4-6

The LORD is high above all nations;  
His glory is above the heavens.  
Who is like the LORD our God,  
Who is enthroned on high,  
Who humbles Himself to behold  
The things that are in heaven and in the earth?

You look for one theme in these verses and you come up with the word, "up." God is higher than the nations (verse 4). God's glory is above the heavens (verse 4). God is enthroned on high (verse 5). To see the things on earth, He needs to stoop (verse 6). That's what verses 4-6 are talking about. And this is reason to praise the LORD.

He is High and Exalted (verses 4-6). And He demands our worship. These words are reminiscent of Isaiah's vision of the LORD, as recorded in Isaiah, chapter 6.

Isaiah 6:1-3

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said,

"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts,  
The whole earth is full of His glory."

The LORD is high and exalted, and worthy to be worshiped. Let's just think about how high the LORD is. Verse 4 says that he is "high above all nations." We, in the 21st century, have a much better idea of what this means than when this was written. Because, we know what it looks like "above all nations."

I know that most of you have ridden in an airplane. And what have you seen as you looked out the window? <sup>[1]</sup> That's how God sees our planet. He is "above all nations" (verse 4).

But, the LORD is higher than that. We read in verse 4 that "His glory is above the heavens." So, actually, God's view of the earth is more like seeing things from 217 miles above the earth in the space station. <sup>[2]</sup> Well, actually a better image might be that of seeing earth from the moon. <sup>[3]</sup>

But, actually, God's view is more like that from Voyager 1. A few weeks ago, I told you of Voyager 1, a spacecraft launched in 1977 to study the outer Solar System. It's traveling about 10 miles per second, or about 325 million miles per year. On February 14, 1990, when Voyager 1 was nearing the end of its planned mission, NASA commanded the probe to turn around and photograph the planets of our solar system. When it pointed back to earth, this is the picture that it took from 3.7 billion miles from earth. <sup>[4]</sup> Earth is the blueish-white speck about halfway down the brown band to the right. This famous photo has been called, the "Pale Blue Dot." This is us. This is how God sees us.

Well, in fact, that's not quite true either. Consider a picture of our Solar System as generated by the stars we have catalogued (with some educated guesses). <sup>[5]</sup>

But, that's not quite how God sees us either. Because, in fact, our galaxy is only one of hundreds of billions of galaxies in this universe. The Hubble Space Telescope was placed into orbit in 1990 and has given us some spectacular views of the universe. One of the most interesting pictures that I have ever seen of outer space are the "Ultra-Deep Field" pictures that the Hubble Space Telescope has taken. Scientists have pointed the telescope in some of the darkest portions of the sky, zoomed in as far as they could, and shot pictures. What did they see? More stars and more galaxies. Wherever we might look there are more and more and more stars and galaxies awaiting our discovery. The Milky Way is but one of these galaxies. <sup>[6]</sup>

From God's throne, He sees our hundreds of billions of stars as a speck in the sky. Each star, by the way, God calls by name (Is. 40:26). And God has "marked off the heavens by the span" (i.e. 9 inches) (Is. 40:12). That's why verse 5 asks the question, ...

Psalm 113:5

Who is like the LORD our God,  
Who is enthroned on high,

There's nobody like our God! He is far more incomprehensible than you could ever imagine. Theologians say that God is "transcendent." That is, He "transcends" our earth. He is so far above us. And now, can you understand the magnitude of verse 6?

Psalm 113:6

Who humbles Himself to behold  
The things that are in heaven and in the earth?

In other words, for God to see anything taking place upon earth, He must stoop low. He needs to stoop low just to see the Milky Way in the night sky. He needs to stoop lower yet just to see the sun in the Milky Way. He needs to stoop lower yet just to see the earth. He needs to stoop lower yet to see the cities of the earth. He needs to stoop lower yet to see any of us. He needs to stoop lower yet to care for any of us. Such is the humility of God, that He does this.

We may take it for granted that the LORD stoops low to see us. We are so self-centered to think that we matter in this universe! If anything, my hope would be that our little walk through the universe might help to persuade you otherwise. In the grand scope of things, we are "less than nothing and meaningless" (Isaiah 40:17). In fact, this is what Isaiah says of all the nations: "All the nations are as nothing before Him, They are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless" (Isaiah 40:17).

But, this morning, we need to catch the wonder of Psalm 8:3-4. It says: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him?"

Really, who are we that we should be the object of God's attention. But, God has looked upon us. He is mindful of us. He does care for us. He is present in our lives. Theologians often use the word, "immanence" to describe this. Immanent, meaning "remaining in" creation. [\[7\]](#) Thus, the title of my message this morning. Transcendent and Immanent. God is Transcendent: He is utterly not of this world, but far beyond. God is Immanent: He is very present in our lives.

This is the great reality of Jesus. But, not only has the LORD stooped to look. He has stooped to become one of us. His very presence with physically with us.

Philippians 2:5-11

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Jesus Christ humbled Himself to come into the flesh. And what did we do to him? We killed Him! That's what we did. We nailed Him upon the cross and let Him die a slow and painful death! Such was our hatred towards God!

Yet, in God's marvelous plan of redemption, the death of Jesus means our life, because His death was a substitutionary death. He died for us. He died in our place. Our sin deserved punishment. But, God came to take that punishment. We simply need to believe and trust in Christ, and our sins are forgiven -- taken away, never again to rise against us!

How blessed we are that our transcendent God has come to be with us! Oh, church family, do you see it?

Can you imagine Psalm 113 being read at the Passover, with Jesus sitting there? Can you imagine how he may have thought of the disciples? They didn't get it. God had "humbled Himself to behold," He was sitting at the table with them, and they still did not understand. They missed it. Are you missing it? Or, do you see how high and exalted Jesus is?

Let's move on to my third point.

### **3. He Helps the Humble (verses 7-9).**

Verses 7-9 identify those upon whom God's favor rests. It rests upon the lowly.

Psalm 113:7-9

He raises the poor from the dust  
And lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
To make them sit with princes,  
With the princes of His people.  
He makes the barren woman abide in the house  
As a joyful mother of children.  
Praise the LORD!

In these verses we see God raising up the humble. They may be poor and in the dust (verse 7). They may be needy and in the ash heap (verse 7). They may be barren and childless (verse 9). But God helps them, lifting them up (verse 8) and blessing them with children (verse 9). The general principle is this: that God looks with favor upon the humble. God looks with favor upon those who are distressed.

Isaiah 66 tells us, "Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? For My hand made all these things, Thus all these things came into being,' declares the Lord. 'But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.'" (Isaiah 66:1-2). And in Isaiah 57:15, we read, "For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit In order to revive the spirit of the lowly And to revive the heart of the contrite.'" Further, James 4:6 says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Everyone loves a Cinderella story. When someone comes out of nowhere, and does something great. Abraham Lincoln is an example of this. He was born in a one-room cabin in rural Kentucky. He was the first in his family to read. And yet, he arose to president of the United States of America.

Herbert Hoover has a similar story. He was born in a two-room cottage in Iowa to a pious Quaker family. A few years ago, our family visited his birth-place. There was nothing remarkable about his upbringing. And yet, he became a self-made millionaire who rose to the presidency.

If you look, these stories are all around us. There are stories of those who were poor and needy, but arose to great prominence. There are stories like this in the Bible. Take Joseph, for example. He rose from humble beginnings to be second in command in Egypt, the most powerful nation on the planet at the time. Yes, his family had a measure of wealth, possessing flocks and herds. But, they were only shepherds, despised by the people of Egypt. That's why they settled in the land of Goshen, away from the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34).

Anyway, whatever wealth Joseph and his family possessed, it sure didn't help him when he was sold into slavery by his brothers. But, God had a plan.

God sent Joseph ahead to save Israel. And the path to prominence was down, then up. He was wrongly accused. He was wrongly imprisoned. He was forgotten. But, God was with him. And, God was the one who raised him up to be lord of all Egypt (Genesis 45:8-9). Indeed, the Lord raised him up to "sit with princes" (verse 8).

What about David? His story is similar. He too was a shepherd. He was from the lowly city of Bethlehem. Micah 5:2 says that Bethlehem was "too little to be among the clans of Judah." It was a little, insignificant town.

And David was the youngest of his brothers. When Samuel came to anoint the next king of Israel, he came into Jesse's house, looking for the one whom God chose. He went through seven of Jesse's eight sons, but none of them were God's chosen one. Jesse didn't even think to summon little David from his shepherding task, as he was the youngest and most insignificant of the family.

But, this is the one whom God raised up to be king of Israel. This is the one to whom God said, ...

2 Samuel 7:8-9,12-13, 16

I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. ... I will make you a great name, like the names of the great men who are on the earth....

When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ...

Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.

God made this promise to a small, shepherd boy.

Psalms 113:7-8

He raises the poor from the dust  
And lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
To make them sit with princes,  
With the princes of His people.

And would the truth be known, such is the story of every believer in Christ. The path into the kingdom of God always begins low. We don't come into the kingdom based upon all of our merits and accomplishments. No, we come humble and repentant over our sin. We come on our knees, pleading mercy at the cross of Christ.

And God lifts us up. He adopts us into His family (1 John 3:1). We become joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). We will inherit the kingdom, ruling and reigning as priests forever.

I love the verses in Revelation 1 -- "To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood -- and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father--to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5-6). Revelation 5:9-10 is similar: "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

We have come from the dust. He will raise us up. But, it all begins with a humble heart. Do you want to be used of God? The path to go up is down. Seek His face upon your knees and trust the Lord to accomplish His purposes in you. "Are you seeking great things for yourself? Seek them not!" (Jeremiah 45:5). "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

That's the picture here of verse 7, "lifting the needy from the ash heap." Ashes were often used as a sign of repentance. And God lifts the repentant. And, it's not only in the ages to come that we will know God's favor in our lives. No, God will often raise us up in our day and age. Look again at verse 9.

Psalms 113:9

He makes the barren woman abide in the house  
As a joyful mother of children.

Few things in life are more painful than a barren womb. Proverbs 30:15-16 says it this way, "There are three things that will not be satisfied, Four that will not say, "Enough": Sheol, and the barren womb, Earth that is never satisfied with water, And fire that never says, 'Enough.'"

The barren womb will not be satisfied. I spoke with a friend of mine this week, who told me of the blessing that verse 9 has been in his life. Both he and his wife were in their 30's when they were married. Soon after their marriage, she became pregnant. They lost the child at 7 months. She delivered the still-born in the hospital. He told me that this was the biggest test for faith in her life.

Psalms 113 become a comfort to their souls. What was so comforting about this Psalm is that it speaks of the character of God. He is a good God who cares for his people. So often, God has given children to barren women. Sarah (Genesis 16) eventually gave birth to Isaac. Rebekah (Genesis 25:21) eventually gave birth to Jacob and Esau. Rachel (Genesis 30) eventually gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin. Monoah's wife (Judges 13) eventually gave birth to Samson. Hannah (1 Samuel 1) eventually gave birth to Samuel. Elizabeth (Luke 1) eventually gave birth to John the Baptist. This simply shows how good God is. He is the kind of God that shows favor to His people. This reality has been the source of much blessing in the lives of my friends.

Since my friends lost their first child, the Lord has blessed my friends with two boys. Indeed, God has shown them favor.

And the clear message this morning for us is this: Do you need God's help? Then, know how great a God we have. He is enthroned on high! So, seek Him with humility. He looks with favor upon the humble, raising them from the dust and lifting them from the ash heap.

I want to close this morning by reading Hannah's prayer for a son. It beautifully weaves these two themes of the greatness of God and the goodness of God together.

1 Samuel 2:1-10

"My heart exults in the Lord;  
My horn is exalted in the Lord,  
My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,  
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.  
There is no one holy like the Lord,  
Indeed, there is no one besides You,  
Nor is there any rock like our God.  
Boast no more so very proudly,  
Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth;  
For the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
And with Him actions are weighed.  
The bows of the mighty are shattered,  
But the feeble gird on strength.  
Those who were full hire themselves out for bread,  
But those who were hungry cease to hunger.  
Even the barren gives birth to seven,  
But she who has many children languishes.  
The Lord kills and makes alive;  
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
The Lord makes poor and rich;  
He brings low, He also exalts.  
He raises the poor from the dust,  
He lifts the needy from the ash heap  
To make them sit with nobles,  
And inherit a seat of honor;  
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,  
And He set the world on them.  
He keeps the feet of His godly ones,  
But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness;  
For not by might shall a man prevail.  
Those who contend with the Lord will be shattered;  
Against them He will thunder in the heavens,  
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
And He will give strength to His king,  
And will exalt the horn of His anointed."

Praise the LORD!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 1, 2014 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

---

[1] See <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/100-incredible-views-out-of-airplane-windows>

[2] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B18UEqn5Yw4>

[3] See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earthrise> and <http://svs.gsfc.nasa.gov/vis/a010000/a011300/a011348/s3-1024.jpg>

[4] See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pale\\_Blue\\_Dot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pale_Blue_Dot)

[5] See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njXUmDuONVw> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ID75RUg9wAs>

[6] See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble\\_Ultra-Deep\\_Field](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hubble_Ultra-Deep_Field)

[7] You can read more in Grudem's Systematic Theology, p. 267.