

For the start of the year we have thought about two questions:

First, What does God think is possible for you in 2020? I explained that God wants us to become more like Jesus, developing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. That change is possible if you trust God.

Second, we asked what do we need to do in order to become more like Jesus? The answer was to choose to leave behind, or put aside, things that stop us living godly lives and focus our attention on Jesus.

Today I want to think about a practical way we can do this. The readings this month are taken from the Stewardship Department of the Church of Scotland. The finance committee here had a Stewardship Rep down before Christmas to talk about where we are financially as a congregation. The truth is, we are £11,000 in debt. We owe Edinburgh that money for our Mission and Ministry contributions and we don't have it. We don't have the accounts yet, so I'm not sure where the problem arose, except that our giving and use of buildings income is down. The Session will need to look at that and we'll give more info at the ASM. These readings have been chosen to remind us that focussing on Jesus and becoming more like him should affect our whole life – including our giving; but they also remind us that God is faithful, this is his church and we must trust him.

Psalm 105 begins with a call to praise and it ends with a call to praise. In the middle we have a lot of reasons why we should praise the LORD.

Verse 1 at the beginning simply says, "Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name;" Verse 45 at the end says, "Praise the LORD!" The heart of the Psalm is all about the fact that God "has remembered His covenant forever" (verse 8).

From verses 9-45, the Psalmist talks about God's faithfulness to Israel during the Exodus. He recounts His miracles, His protection, and His provision. The hinge comes in verse 5: *Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,*

Psalm 105 contains 500 years of Israel's history, beginning with Abraham (verse 9); continuing through Isaac and Jacob (verses 9-10); then further through Joseph (verse 17); and ending with Israel's entrance into the promised land (verse 44).

Psalm 105 has been called an historical Psalm, along with Psalm 106 and Psalm 78, each of which have equally long sections telling of Israel's history. Psalm 106 is much like this Psalm. The difference, however, is that Psalm 105 emphasizes God's faithfulness to the covenant "which He made with Abraham" (verse 9) but Psalm 106 emphasizes Israel's unfaithfulness throughout their history. But, in both of these Psalms, Israel was called to praise the LORD.

In fact, that's how Israel used Psalm 105 in their history. The first half of this Psalm was used in celebration when the ark of the covenant first came into the tabernacle in David's day. David assigned Asaph (and his relatives) the duty of giving thanks to the LORD on that day. They used this Psalm to guide their celebration. Perhaps you remember this as the day that stirred the heart of king David so much that he was "leaping and dancing and celebrating before the LORD" (2 Samuel 6:16; 1 Chronicles 15:29).

Perhaps it would do you well to picture that day in Israel's history, when the ark of God finally came into the tabernacle in Jerusalem. You can read about that event in 1 Chronicles 16.

I see two applications in this Psalm. The first is this:

1. Glorify God (verses 1-5).

In these verses, there are numerous instructions to glorify the LORD in one way or another. All of these instructions come back to one theme: glorify God! And not without reason. We are called to praise the LORD because of the "wonders which He has done" (verse 5). Did you see how rapid fire these commands come?

Psalm 105:1-5

Give praise to the LORD,
Call on His name
Make known among the nations what he has done
Sing to Him,
sing praises to Him
Tell of all His wonderful acts
Glory in His holy name
Let the heart of those who seek the Lord rejoice
Look to the Lord and His strength
Seek His face always

Remember His wonders He has done, His miracles and the judgments he pronounced

Do you feel the excitement in that? He seems to say the same thing over and over and over again. So, let's quickly run through each of these phrases to see just how broad our praise of God should be.

First of all, in verse 1 we see, ...

a. Give praise to the LORD

In praising God, we acknowledge who he is, what he has done for us and the gifts that he has given to us. Giving praise isn't trying to repay the LORD for what He has given to us. It is simply an expression of our gratitude for the kindness of the LORD. And in this, God is glorified.

b. Call on His name.

Whereas giving praise is acknowledging who God is, calling upon His name is an expression of need. We call upon the one who provides us with all things. God is equally glorified in this, as it shows our dependence upon Him. God isn't glorified when we are self-sufficient. God is glorified when we acknowledge our need of Him.

c. Make known among the nations what he has done.

When we speak to others (or write about) the great things that the LORD has done, it brings attention to Him and gives reason to glorify Him. We are told over and over again to tell others what God has done and that people can only come to believe if they hear the message.

d. Sing to Him.

When we think of worship and glorifying God, this is often one of the first things that comes to mind: we sing to Him. And rightly so. When God puts a song on our heart, it must be sung! Notice here that the song is sung to God.

e. Sing praise to Him;

This second phrase of verse 2 is a virtual synonym to the first. We should sing our praises! We are called to extol Him. We are called to exalt Him. We are called to sing of how great God is. We are called to give Him what is due! It's so important we're told twice.....

f. Tell of his wonderful acts.

Not only are we called to sing, we are also called to "speak." This is what Psalm 105 is all about, speaking of all of the wonderful things that the LORD has done: His miracles, His protection, His provision, His favour, His grace, and His kindness.

g. Glory in His holy name;

To glory in the name of God simply means that we praise His name. We lift Him high. We rejoice in His greatness. We enjoy the fact that He is utterly beyond our understanding!

h. Let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

This is the first of three phrases calling us to "seek the LORD." With the phrases, the emphasis isn't so much about telling others about the greatness of God. It's beyond that; it's about being in His presence, where we actually experience Him. We are treasure hunters on quest for a treasure, which is God, Himself! And in the process of searching and in the finding, our hearts will be made glad.

i. Seek the Lord and His strength;

All of us need help in this life. We are not sufficient in and of ourselves. But, He, the LORD can give us everything we need. We aren't going to find that help in a doctrine or in a philosophy or in a new way of thinking. We are only going to find it in the LORD and in His strength. And God will be found by those who seek for Him with all of their hearts (Jeremiah 29:13; Deuteronomy 4:29).

And this isn't a one-time thing. We are to ...

j. Seek His face continually.

That means all the time. This is an identifying characteristic of a child of God. He's not going through life alone. Rather, he is continually seeking the presence of God. He is continuing to walk with God. He is continuing to learn from God. He is continuing to love God. Seeking and praying throughout everyday for the LORD's presence to be evident through the day.

And finally, in verse 5, we come to the crux of the Psalm.

k. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles and the judgments he pronounced

This is Psalm 105. It is a Psalm of remembrance. It is a Psalm that looks back in history to the wonderful things that the LORD has done for Israel. But, it's not merely an intellectual look at history. It's a history that gives glory to God. It's a history that ought to stir our hearts to sing the praises of God. We put fuel into cars to make them go. When we think on God's faithfulness in history, it will propel us into worship.

It's a good word for us this morning. When you are seeking to worship the LORD, looking to fuel the passions of your heart for Him, look to the wonderful things that the LORD has done for His people. That is like fuel for our worship.

That's why reading the historical books of the Old Testament can lead us into praise of God. Because we can rejoice in the ways that He has worked in the past, trusting in Him to work in similar ways in the future. We can read the book of Acts, which tells the history of the early church, and rejoice at what He did to begin His church, trusting that the LORD will continue His work in the future. We can study church history to see the ways that God took a few people, the disciples of Jesus, and "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6) with the gospel that has spread all over the world.

The second point is that we are to glorify God and the fuel that fires us is to -

2. Remember His Faithfulness (verses 6-45).

The theme of the sovereignty of God is developed throughout the rest of the Psalm. As you read this summary of the history of Israel, you quickly discover that it was really "His story" from start to finish.

- It is God who initiated the covenant with Abraham (verse 9-11).
- It is God who carried out the covenant (verses 12-15).
- It is God who brought famine upon the land (verse 16).
- It is God who sent Joseph to Egypt to preserve the Jews (verse 17).
- It is God who caused the people of Israel to flourish in Egypt (verse 24).
- It is God who turned the hearts of Egypt against the Hebrews (verse 25).
- It is God who sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh (verse 26).
- It is God who brought all of the devastating plagues upon Egypt (verses 28-36).

- It is God who brought the people out of Egypt (verse 37).
- It is God who protected them in the wilderness with the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (verse 39).
- It is God who satisfied them with the manna (verse 40).
- It is God who gave them water to drink when they were thirsty (verse 41).

And all of this leads us to praise the LORD. God is sovereign over the affairs of men. In this Psalm, we see God's sovereignty over the history of Israel. But, what He did with Israel, He does with all nations. "His judgments are in all the earth" (verse 7). And then comes verse 8, the key statement of the Psalm. Verse 8, ...

Psalm 105:8

He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations

That's why God was faithful to Israel: because He has made a covenant with them. These are words that we ought not to take lightly. They tell us that God made a promise, and that he's sticking to it. What promise did He make?

Genesis 12:1-3 God said, "I will give you land. I will make you a nation. I will bless you. Your blessing will extend to all the families of the earth." God repeated this covenant on a number of occasions (Genesis 15:5, 18; Genesis 17:1-8). He repeated it to Isaac (Genesis 26:2-5). He repeated it to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15). And God kept that promise. Israel became a great nation. Israel was given the land. And we are called to remember that God remembered His covenant. In fact, this is what was repeated at the end of the short history lesson. Look at verse 42, ...

Psalm 105:42

For He remembered His holy word with Abraham His servant;

But, there's more than that for us. Because, just as Israel looked to the covenant that God made with them and to God's faithfulness throughout their history, we also might look at the covenant that God has made with us, and to God's faithfulness throughout church history to that covenant. And just as Israel was to be turned to praise, so also might we be turned to praise as well.

What covenant did God make with us? It's called the "New Covenant," which was prophesied in Jeremiah. It is the covenant in which God promised the day

when He would put His law upon our hearts, changing us from within, and saying, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Jeremiah 31:33). This covenant was fulfilled in Jesus.

Do you remember the words of Jesus when He instituted the Lord's Supper? He held up the cup in His hand and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood" (1 Cor. 11:25). His death upon the cross was going to bring in a new era of salvation history, the new covenant. Jesus would pay the penalty for what our sins deserved, and we would know full forgiveness -- something that the law could never provide (Hebrews 10:2). And God would work in the hearts of men to change them from the inside out through repentance for forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47).

And down through the ages, God has been faithful to the New Covenant that He made with all who believe in Jesus. Just as Israel looked back to God's faithfulness to the covenant He made with Abraham and rejoiced, so also do we look back to God's faithfulness to the new covenant, which Jesus inaugurated with His blood, and it stirs our souls to rejoice in God!

Verses 12-15 describe the process that God used. It began small, with only Abraham and Sarah. But God protected them that His promise might prevail. They were past their nineties before they had their first child. And yet, God's hand of protection was upon them.

God did a similar thing with the church. He began with a small number (a dozen disciples). To these few men Jesus made the promise, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

The Psalm then tells the story of Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brother. He was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and unjustly imprisoned for several years. He was betrayed by fellow prisoners who failed to keep a promise. But, through it all, God exalted him to ruler of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. And it was his position of authority that eventually rescued Israel from the famine that God brought upon the land (verse 16).

Just when things looked bleak, God rescued Jacob and His family. And throughout church history, this has always been the case. Even when things look bleak, God has always had a remnant. In the days of Elijah, God said that there were still 7,000 who hadn't bow their knees to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

And in the dark ages, when the witness of the church was small, there was always a flicker of light. God raised up men in their day and in their time to build his church -- John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox key men in the days of the reformation, the fruit of which we are reaping today.

God knows what's going on. He will build His church. Throughout history, there have always been times when the church struggled. And there have always been times when the church flourished. We know the church is struggling in Scotland in so many ways. We know change is coming. We know it's going to get tougher. But we also know that God is faithful; this is his church; and, we can trust him.