

God is Seated on High; What Does He Say About You?

The 18th Sunday after Pentecost [Proper 20] September 18, 2016

PSALM 113

¹ Praise the LORD! Praise, O servants of the LORD,

praise the name of the LORD!

² Blessed be the name of the LORD

from this time forth and forevermore!

³ From the rising of the sun to its setting,

the name of the LORD is to be praised!

⁴ **The LORD is high above all nations,**

and his glory above the heavens!

⁵ **Who is like the LORD our God,**

who is seated on high,

⁶ **who looks far down**

on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ **He raises the poor from the dust**

and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

⁸ **to make them sit with princes,**

with the princes of his people.

⁹ **He gives the barren woman a home,**

making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!

IN THE NAME JESUS.

The Lord is high above the nations, he is seated on the throne, he looks down on Earth, there is nothing outside his sight, and he raises the poor and needy from the ashes and gives the barren woman a home.

Psalm 113 gives us the words to extol the Lord on high. He is going to set all things in order. All the things we set into disorder and death by bringing sin into his creation—he is going to restore it all. Nothing of creation is left outside his care. He sees all nations, people of every tongue and tribe, he sees the warfare, the positioning of nation against nation, the way governments oppress their own people instead of protecting lives and families, and it is all under his judgment, and will all be restored.

He never intended any person to be hungry, any woman to have difficulty in childbearing, any husband and wife to have discord, any family to have pain; he created us for none of that; and he who reigns in Heaven will restore it all.

Psalm 113 is about Jesus. God the Son who descended from Heaven to become human, to take on all our sin, though he himself was without sin, who underwent our shame and suffering, going to the cross on our behalf, he is now ascended to Heaven, all authority in Heaven and on Earth having been given to him by his Father. Jesus has atoned for the sin, has forgiven the sinner, has reconciled us to his Father, and will restore all things which we now see under the covering of sin and shame.

But we do not now see this restoration. We can't see it with our eyes. Our eyes see the damage of sin all around us, the sickness and death, the brokenness, the conflict between neighbors who should only love one another. But we don't see his restoration with our eyes, not yet. But we do know it by faith, for the same Jesus who atoned for all sin on the cross, now reigns in Heaven, and from Heaven sends forth his Word for every sinner to hear and to be restored by. It is his word of mercy.

To show us his Word of mercy, Jesus tells a parable, a strange parable where nothing makes sense. A rich man has a manager. The manager has been wasting the possessions of the rich man. How has he wasted them? We don't know. Jesus doesn't say.

When the manager has been wasting the possessions, the rich owner then demands an accounting: the rules must be followed, the ledgers must balance. Luke 16:2:

“There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. ² And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’”

Then, the manager comes up with the genius idea to go out and forgive debts of those who owe money to the rich man who hired him. Luke 16:7:

⁵ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ ⁶ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ ⁷ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’

Then, in the strangest possible turn, the rich man doesn’t say to the manager, “Since you cheated me, not only am I firing you, but I’m also having you thrown into prison,” rather, he commends him for his wisdom. The text we have in front of us says he commended him for his shrewdness, but the Greek word is a word for wisdom or discernment. Luke 16:8:

⁸ The master commended the dishonest manager for his discernment.

How does this parable even possibly make sense? It doesn’t make sense that the unrighteous manager actually thinks it will work to ingratiate himself to all the debtors by forgiving their debt. What would stop them, after all, from cheating him too, later down the road? It doesn’t make sense how he forgives debts, forgiving one 50 percent, another 20 percent. It’s all willy-nilly, it’s all over the place, nothing adds up. And it doesn’t make sense that the rich man would commend him for losing his wealth.

Until we step back and realize what’s crucial to the owner. The owner did not like it when his manager was wasting his wealth. But when his manager wasted his wealth even more by forgiving debts, the owner commended him. And all the sudden it makes sense. This parable doesn’t tell us how to be an efficient manager; it doesn’t tell us about the stewardship of money—for the stewardship of money ends up being a disaster in this parable; this parable doesn’t show us how to get along in life without going to prison, for we would’ve expected that the unrighteous manager would have been thrown into prison for what he did; but this parable will not let us loose from one thing: the owner will not put up with his wealth to being wasted, but, when his wealth is being handed out generously and abundantly, with no rhyme or reason, the owner is, finally, pleased.

The parable is about, then, mercy. God wants debts released. Debts released make no sense. For if the Law holds the sinner guilty, then to release the debts of the sinner is a breaking of the Law, and that makes no sense.

But mercy never makes sense. It's not rational. It doesn't add up. It's taking the ledger sheets and burning them. And the person telling the parable is Jesus, who came down from Heaven to release debts, to generously and abundantly dispense the wealth of his Father, with no rhyme or reason, but to whomever he pleases, always grace upon grace. For he fulfilled the Law in our stead.

Our faith is in Jesus. For the Law, for the holding onto debts, for adding to someone's shame, we need no faith. That's all just the work of our sinful flesh, to hold onto debts and let bitterness grow.

But our faith is in Jesus, who came to forgive debts, even when, especially when, it makes no sense. Because, it's all by the mercy and grace of God.

The Lord Jesus sits on high, enthroned in Heaven, and he is, in his Word, dispensing the gifts of his Father, freely and abundantly, with no rhyme or reason, but with the full generosity of his Father.

For us to hold onto debts, for us to let bitterness grow, is to deny the ascension of Jesus, where he now reigns, dispensing gifts to the poor, to the needy, to the sinner, to all living in any impoverishment. Psalm 113:

⁴ The LORD is high above all nations,

and his glory above the heavens!

⁵ Who is like the LORD our God,

who is seated on high,

⁶ who looks far down

on the heavens and the earth?

⁷ He raises the poor from the dust

and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

⁸ to make them sit with princes,

with the princes of his people.

⁹ He gives the barren woman a home,

making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD!

He will restore it all on the Last Day. The hunger, the sickness, the barrenness, the brokenness, it will all be restored. We will then see it by sight. As we await that day, we now know it by faith. For as he gathers us to his Name, he is speaking to us his Word from the throne in Heaven. And it is the word of mercy, the word of sins forgiven, the word of the restoration of all things, it is the word beckoning us to receive his Body and Blood for the forgiveness of all our sins.

IN THE NAME JESUS.