



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Psalm 111: 1-10

Spring 2024

"The God To Be Feared"

TRANSCRIPT

Well, good morning. Good to be with you this Sunday morning, and we are between series. We did finish the Book of Ephesians a couple of weeks ago, and that was a great experience for me to preach through it again. And we've got another series coming in the near future; but in between I'm going to teach a couple of psalms, Psalm 111, and then when Peter's here next week, there'll be a break. And then after Peter Lillback has preached, I'll preach another Psalm, 112. And then we'll begin a series on Elisha.

But this morning, Psalm 111, and what a great Psalm it is.

**111** Praise the Lord! (*That's a translation of hallelujah*), Hallelujah!

I will give thanks to the Lord with all *my* heart,

In the company of the upright and in the assembly.

<sup>2</sup> Great are the works of the Lord;

*They are* studied by all who delight in them.

<sup>3</sup> Splendid and majestic is His work,

And His righteousness endures forever. (*notice this word 'forever'*)

<sup>4</sup> He has made His wonders to be remembered;

The Lord is gracious and compassionate.

<sup>5</sup> He has given food to those who fear Him;  
He will remember His covenant forever.

<sup>6</sup> He has made known to His people the power of His works,  
In giving them the heritage of the nations.

<sup>7</sup> The works of His hands are truth and justice;  
All His precepts are sure.

<sup>8</sup> They are upheld forever and ever;  
They are performed in truth and uprightness.

<sup>9</sup> He has sent redemption to His people;  
He has ordained His covenant forever;  
Holy and awesome is His name.

<sup>10</sup> The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;  
A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*;  
His praise endures forever.

Psalm 111: 1-10

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, what a privilege it is to be with Your people on this LORD's day, and what a beautiful day it is; we thank You for it. We thank You for Your goodness to us every moment in life; but this is a great blessing, to be together with Your people, to worship together, publicly as we're doing, and worship in a way in which we learn more things about You, or remind ourselves about great truths that we know about You, and then remember them, for that leads to worship—and that's what our Psalm is about this morning.

And so LORD, I pray that we would honor You in all the things that we think and do. I pray that our hearts, as we go through this Psalm, would be lifted up to You in a sense of worship and praise that is in the spirit of this Psalm, which captured the heart

and the mind of this psalmist. So bless us LORD, for Your works are unfolded for us in this Psalm and they are wonderful to consider. And so bless us, guide us in our thinking, and enrich us with Your truth. And sanctify us; make us more like Christ, make us men and women who long to know You more and to grow in grace and knowledge.

We pray these things spiritually for ourselves. Build us up in the faith, but we need help physically as well. Some are sick, some are dealing with surgeries; we pray for them. LORD, You know all of our needs materially, we live and we move and we exist in You. You give us every breath of life we take. We have every reason to praise Your works, as the psalmist does, and thank You for Your goodness to us and Your provision for us daily, hourly, moment by moment. Thank You.

Give us a good hour in worship and study that's before us. We thank You for all that we have in Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

(Message) A year ago, two of my grandchildren were reading Homer's *Iliad* for school. Not easy reading for their age, but it got me thinking about it. The *Iliad* is considered one of the most significant books of western civilization. It was Alexander the Great's 'bible'. He carried a copy of it with him as he led his army across the world.

It begins in the tenth year of the war between the Greeks and Trojans. It has heroic warriors, Achilles and Hector, Odysseus and Ajax, with lots of battles described in gruesome detail—and more. Behind the scenes, 'the gods' helped their favorite warriors. Some favored the Greeks, some favored the Trojans, and all of them tried to affect the outcome by plotting and fighting against each other.

'The gods' are feckless; you see that as you read through it. But that's what makes the poem rather interesting and significant, I think, for it's more than a war novel, it's really a window into the soul of ancient man who believed that there was more to reality than what is seen; that there are 'gods', who have influence over us. 'The gods', as I said, are feckless. They're no different from the people who worship them, showing how dark man's mind was. —But really no darker than modern man who believes reality is only in what is seen.

How different both ancient pagans and modern materialists are from the righteous, who have lived among them from the beginning and whose understanding of reality comes from the Hebrew Bible.

Psalm 111 is both revelation and the product of divine revelation—the product of natural, (or general), revelation, as the psalmist looked around and saw all that was revealed about God from the world that he could see. This is a psalm for modern man as much as ancient man.

It tells that there is more to reality than mere matter, (which is ultimately doomed to pass away). God is. He holds reality together. Unlike imaginary gods of myth that are long forgotten, He is forever. Four times in the Psalm we read this word, “forever.’ And it ends, “His praise endures forever.” (vs10c). He is pure. He is wise. He is powerful. He is eternal; so it follows that He's the one we should trust in. He's the one to be feared. That, as the psalmist reminds us in verse 10, “...is the beginning of wisdom.” He feared the LORD; and because he did, he rejoiced in the LORD.

The Psalm begins with an outburst of worship. “*Hallelujah!*” is the first word of Psalm 111; “Praise the LORD!” It's a genuine, emotional outburst of adoration, devotion, and celebration. It's all contained within a carefully constructed Psalm arranged in what is known as, ‘an *acrostic*’. And what that means is, the first word of each line after “Hallelujah” begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In English it would begin with a word that starts with A, and then the next line with a word that begins with B, and then the next line with a word that begins with C—and so on through the alphabet. Probably that was done to facilitate memorization, which, in the case of this psalmist, would suggest that these things that he wrote about, he believed were very important and needed to be put to memory.

But we lose the acrostic in translation. It doesn't help us, but it does indicate the great care the psalmist put into composing this Psalm, or ‘poem’, this ‘song’. The cause of his praise, his ‘*hallelujah*’, is the works of God: Which encompass the works of God in

creation, the works of God in His providence, and the works of God in His grace—His salvation.

His thoughts move from the material to the spiritual, from the universe to the exodus. And again, it give enthusiasm to his praise of the LORD:

"I will give thanks to the LORD with all *my* heart,

In the company of the upright, and in the assembly." (vs1)

That's how praise ought to be given to the LORD, 'with all our heart'. Full throated, not half-hearted—with our minds fully engaged, our intellect and our understanding, our wills and emotion, all of it fully engaged.

But to be able to do that, we must think on the right things, and think about them correctly. Only a person with a new heart, a regenerated soul; only the born again can do that. And it's among the born again that the psalmist wants to praise the LORD and express his thankfulness to the LORD among the community, or the council and assembly of the righteous. We have a need to express our love for the LORD publicly—in public worship. That's as true in the church today as it was in ancient Israel.

But we can't do that with unbelievers. Our praise is foolishness to them. And so the psalmist longed to be among friends. He longed to be among like-minded people, and engage in worship with them—praising God with the people of God. That's fellowship.

But genuine worship and thanksgiving begins in the heart. —It is personal. Public worship encourages worship; it's necessary. But worship, "with all my heart", (vs1), is first of all, individual; it is personal. And when it is, then we will proclaim the LORD among the unregenerate, among the unbelieving. We won't do it indiscriminately, we'll do it wisely, not mechanically. But when the opportunity is right, our hearts will be prepared to give the truth of God to those around us and live it.

"With all *my* heart", speaks of deep conviction and gratitude that the psalmist had. So how do we have that? That's the wellspring of worship, so how do we get that? How do we generate in our whole soul this desire to worship and praise the LORD?

It's by studying the things of God. That's what the psalmist did—and what all who do, who worship the LORD. Verse 2;

"Great are the works of the LORD;

*They are* studied by all who delight in them."

"*The works*" here, are God's 'works of creation'. It is in reference to those "works" that this word, *works*, is generally used: It's what God has made. For example, in Psalm 8, verse 3&4;

"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?"

As David looked at the world; the beauty of nature, the variety and complexity, and the order of the natural world—and especially the magnificent display of God's creation in the night sky...he marveled. He marveled at all of that; and then marveled that God had made, 'man the crown of His creation', in light of it. (Psa 8:5)

And it's the same in Psalm 19, verse 1 that begins,

"The heavens are telling of the glory of God;

And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands."

There it's "the work of His hands", and there we see it again. As a shepherd boy, David spent a lot of time looking at the sky at night, studying the moon and the stars. And he didn't miss the meaning of it—that it, 'Declared the glory of God', and that naturally led to worship...and without the aid of modern science, he did that.

We know so much more today that is not revealed to the naked eye: The vastness of space, the number of the stars and galaxies. It produces wonder in all who

consider it. That wonder, should produce in those who study these things and who observe these things, it should produce worship—as should a consideration of man himself, who seems so small and insignificant in the greater scheme of things, as suggested in Psalm 8.

But man is a marvel, created from dust, in the image of God, (but that image has been wrecked by the fall). But still, there is a glimmer of it, a very clear glimmer of it. And the human body is a universe in and of itself, made up of 30 trillion cells. It's amazing!...almost like our national debt! *[Laughter]* And all those cells function and work together in harmony with each other. They're full of life—infused with life.

And then that raises the questions: What is life? How did it come to be? What is the soul, the immaterial part of our being? Man, science, (apart from divine revelation), by human reason alone has never been able to answer those questions. Evolution can't explain how or why it all began...how something came out of nothing. All of science, from astronomy, to biology, and every other discipline points to the Creator. It's called 'natural revelation', 'general revelation', again.

But mankind, both ancient and modern, has refused to believe it—and for a reason. Paul explained that in Romans chapter 1, verses 18 and 19; "...men suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." The heavens *declare* God's existence. Man, himself and herself, *declares* it. Every time we look into the mirror we see the evidence of God the creator staring back at us—His image! It is evident, in the universe around us and within us—'every soul of us', Paul said. Evident, yet men deny it! They, "suppress the truth in unrighteousness", push it down so that they won't have to submit to the God they have rebelled against.

Instead, man found a substitute for the Creator in the creation, and worshiped it as God: 'Four footed things, creeping things', (Rom 1:23), and he is still doing that to this very day; in different ways with different gods. Man worships what he values most.

It may be money, it may be pleasure, it may be fame, it may be any number of things. Mankind is very religious, but his religion is completely irreligious and self-serving.

The psalmist didn't deal with that explicitly, directly here, (the fall of man and human rebellion), but it lies behind his statements. The natural man, man in unbelief, can never say 'Hallelujah!' And the only reason the psalmist could, and the righteous in Israel could, is because of God's grace—which is the greatest reason to praise the LORD, (and he will come to that in this Psalm).

But here at the beginning, he speaks of things generally, of the wonders of creation—and they are many. He wrote that, "They are *studied* by all who delight in them." (vs2b). The only way we will understand God's works is if we "study" them. That takes effort. But actually, though, the word translated "*study*" is the word *seek*. It also means, *to examine*. So *seeking* the truth is an essential part of the life of faith.

Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6, in that great chapter of faith, states that God, "...is a rewarder of those who seek Him." One of the commentators wrote, "Mental indolence...", (or laziness), "Mental indolence never yet led to spiritual illumination. To see much of God's glory we must sweat our brain.", he said. In other words, 'Make every effort.' The psalmist was encouraging that, *to seek, to examine, to study*, 'the great works of God.'

"Splendid and majestic is His work,  
And His righteousness endures forever." (vs3).

Now here, it's a different word for "His work." It is often used of *deeds* or *actions*, so it is more likely, 'His work of providence.' Moses used this word for 'God's work' in Deuteronomy chapter 32, verse 4,

"The Rock! His work is perfect."  
Then he describes His work as,  
"All His ways are just;  
A God of faithfulness and without injustice..."



Clearly here, Moses was describing God's 'works of providence' —how He sustains and governs His creatures, and creation, and all their actions. He is "The Rock!" He is the foundation of all existence—and of our lives. He's firm, unchanging—but always active, and always reliable.

Moses was praising the LORD's character as revealed in His deeds—and the psalmist was, too. His *deeds* are "splendid"; they are "majestic" and "righteous." God's government, His providence, is *righteous*. What can be more splendid and majestic than His act of creation? He spoke everything into existence—and time began. When it was in a prehistoric state of chaos, and the earth was covered in water and darkness, lifeless, and "God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." (Gen 1:3). That's *splendid*!

And such works continue as He regularly, faithfully provides and blesses the world daily, moment by moment, always. That's the promise of Genesis chapter 8, verse 22, "While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease."

They always continue. That's providence; the way the LORD makes the world function. And He is true to His Word. He is always faithful and dependable. As the psalmist said, "His righteousness endures forever." (vs3b).

That's the first of four times he says, "*forever*". God will never cease to be faithful to His promises—to the world generally, and to His people particularly. Men take it for granted: "Seedtime and harvest", they expect it without a thought—without a thought given to God who is the cause of it, and makes it all happen.

Well Jeremiah gave thought to it, and praise to God for it, even though 'the natural man' takes it for granted. He praised the LORD in Lamentations chapter 3, verses 22 and 23, "The LORD's lovingkindnesses," he wrote, "indeed never cease...They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness." He's faithful to all mankind in the natural realm—to the righteous and the unrighteous alike. That is what we call '*common grace*'.

But in verse 4 the psalmist's thoughts move to the LORD's saving act. He mentions the LORD's grace and compassion here in regards to the Passover; the celebration of the LORD's deliverance of Israel from slavery, and all of the events that surrounded that great event. Verses 4 through 9 suggests that with reference to the feeding of the people, giving them the nations as their inheritance, and *redeeming* them—saving them out of a dire condition.

But also in verse 4, the psalmist refers to God's, "wonders to be remembered." Remembering is a very important aspect of Passover, and reinforces that as being the subject here. In Exodus 13, verse 3, Moses told Israel, "Remember this day in which you went out from Egypt, from the house of slavery." They were to remember it all of their life—and they were to celebrate it annually to keep that in their minds and to keep them remembering it.

So the psalmist wrote in verse 4,  
"He has made His wonders to be remembered;  
The LORD is gracious and compassionate."

What wonders? Powerful saving wonders is what he's referring to. In Exodus, chapter 3, verse 20, the LORD said, "I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My *wonders*." It is the same word here, and it refers to the 10 plagues of Egypt—His judgments on that land. They were miracles of great power: From turning the Nile to blood and covering the land in darkness; to slaying the first born at midnight from the house of the king to that of the slave. God said each plague was a judgment on the gods of Egypt to show that they were nothing, and that He alone is God—maker of heaven and earth and judge of all mankind.

But there were also saving "wonders" seen in the mighty hand that brought Israel out of bondage and into freedom. That's what the Psalm celebrates, and that is what should be remembered: He is, "gracious and compassionate."

In verse 5 the psalmist gives examples of that in the LORD's care for His people, Israel.

"He has given food to those who fear Him;  
He will remember His covenant forever."

What covenant is that? Well, it's the covenant that He remembered in Exodus chapter 2, verse 24, when He heard the "groaning" of His people in Egypt, and then, "God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." That *Abrahamic covenant* is in Genesis 15:13-21, when God promised to multiply Abraham's offspring like the stars of the sky, and to give them the land of Canaan. (It's not like the conditional covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai.) In Genesis 15, you'll remember, the LORD alone, passed between the sacrificed piece of the animals to guarantee that He would keep the promise to Abraham. Abraham was not invited to pass through those sacrificed animals. Only God passed through them, showing that it's an *unconditional* covenant—and "forever." What the psalmist wrote, and is saying here, is that very fact: God is faithful to His Word always, "forever." His promises never fail.

And based on that covenant, that unconditional covenant, the psalmist said in verse 6,

"He has made known to His people the power of His works,  
In giving them the heritage of the nations."

'The power of His works' were made known to them, in the plagues on Egypt that brought them out of their slavery, and the works of providence that He performed brought them into Canaan and their inheritance.

And His faithfulness was seen in other ways: In the provision that He made for His people as they wandered through the wilderness between the exodus and the entrance. That's verse 5, "He has given food to those who fear Him;". Every day He fed them manna from heaven—supernatural food. In fact, in Psalm 78, verse 25, it's called,

'Angel's food'; exquisite food, heavenly bread. God was magnificently faithful to His people—daily. Derek Kidner wrote of, "the LORD's daily forbearance", because, (you'll remember), the people received all that they needed, and yet what did they do?...they grumbled and they complained all through that wilderness wandering. Nevertheless, He continued to provide for them and protect them daily.

Christian, Do you think He will not take care of you in the times of wilderness that you pass through? Of course He will...of course He will; that is His character. It's exhibited in all of His works and Words. "His precepts", according to verses 7 and 8. It's not just His works that are to be marveled at, but His Words—His promises that He spoke. He gave Israel His Law on Mt. Sinai; it is "truth and righteousness." (vs8b).

The gods of Egypt and Greece, the gods of the Gentiles didn't speak. They were dumb idols that Isaiah described as, 'a block of wood from which a man kindles a fire to warm himself.' (Isa 44:19). And then with the other part of the wood he fashions a god. Then the man says, 'Deliver me, for you are my god.' But it can't deliver him, or anyone, because it's just "a block of wood!" Nothing more: It can't see, it can't talk, it can't walk, it can't save.

So it is with all false gods—whether it's the gods of the Hindus, the God of the Muslim, or the possessions of the modern materialist. They can't give light, truth, counsel...they can't give help. They can't deliver because they are nothing but a 'fantasy' or 'lifeless stuff'—the imaginations of darkened minds.

Only the Lord God of Scripture saves—the Triune God. And that's how the psalmist describes Him in verse 9, as the one who saves, who, "...sent redemption to His people;" Redemption summarizes God's action in the exodus, in the wanderings, and in the conquest. And His faithfulness to keep His promises to Abraham was demonstrated in the most awesome way at the Red Sea, when He brought Israel safely through, and drowned Egypt in it. That was power, and justice, and deliverance—redemption based on the shedding of the blood of the Passover lambs.

At the end of that, on the other side of the sea, in Exodus chapter 15, Moses led Israel in a song of praise, 'The Song of Moses.' And he proclaimed, "This is my God, and I will extol Him." (vs2). And that's what the psalmist is doing here in Psalm 111, he is saying, 'This is my God. Great are the works of the LORD!'

And those works are real—not like the mythical deeds of Homer's gods and heroes. The LORD is the God of history: Ancient history, modern history, the God of today—He is forever. Why does the psalmist repeat that word? "His righteousness endures forever." (vs3a). "His praise endures forever." (vs10c). Because He is forever. He is the eternal God. He is unique. He is Holy. He is set apart.

When a Greek child asked his or her father, "Who made Zeus?" The father would answer, "Chronos." "Well, who made Chronos?" "Uranus." "Well, who made Uranus?" And so it went—an absurd infinite regression.

But today, when a child asks, "Who made God?" Our answer is, "God didn't need to be made. He's always been. He's eternal, without beginning and without end. He has life in Himself. He is self-existent, self-sufficient. He doesn't need us. He needs nothing. He is endless, bound by nothing but His own will and righteousness, which is perfect.

Everything depends on Him. Nothing is too difficult for Him. His works, all of them, works of creation and providence are wonders. And He's still doing great works. He does today what He did then, but even greater. God's redemption of Israel at the Red Sea is seen in the New Testament as a picture, a *type* of our redemption by Christ at Calvary.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 7, Paul calls Him, "Christ our Passover." The lambs slain that night in Egypt, whose blood was applied to the Israelite doors, predicted Christ on the cross and what He accomplished for us. He brought us out of slavery to sin and death and the devil.

And we are to remember that regularly in the Lord's Supper. That's what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11, verses 23 – 26, where he quoted Jesus who said, "Do this in

remembrance of Me." The LORD blesses us every day with life. He feeds us every day, as He did in the wilderness with Israel. He gives us the energy to work. (That's one of His providential ways of providing for us.) He gives us the discipline, the energy to do work, and so we are able to work and provide for ourselves. And when that energy fails, He has miraculous ways of providing. His providence makes provision and blessing in our lives, daily.

And He has given us immortality, and will bring us into the heavenly Canaan someday. He won't fail. He can't fail. He is our God, Almighty, full of grace and compassion for His people, unconditionally bound to us as that covenant in Genesis 15 illustrates and demonstrates. He is unconditionally bound to His people forever. We can trust Him fully. We can trust Him completely.

That's the wise life that the counsel of the psalmist gives as he closes out this psalm of praise. This is his counsel;

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
A good understanding have all those who do *His commandments*;  
His praise endures forever." (vs10).

"Fear", to us, is normally associated with terror and the instinct to flee, to run from danger. And the author of Hebrews does say, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb 10:31). But he also said, "...we are not of those who shrink back...we have faith...". (Heb 10:39). So here, for the believer, *fear* is *reverence*; it is believing and that produces love for Him—and obedience. It's a sober life, it's a serious life, the fear of the LORD is.

But that is the beginning of wisdom. So, do you want to know reality? Do you want to have an understanding of what this world really is, and know how to live in it so that your life has order and peace—and counts for all eternity? Well that's what wisdom give us; and it only comes to those who trust in the LORD, and follow His lead, and His Word—follow His *revelation*. It's given to those who seek it, those who study it; they

find it. So may we follow the psalmist's counsel and live our life to the LORD and His Word—and follow it faithfully.

Well if you have not done that, if you're here in unbelief, all of this means very little to you. In fact, it may very well have been a rather boring hour for you. If that's so, you're like Homer and those ancient Greeks; your mind is darkened. At least they understood there is more to this world and life than is seen. —And there is...there is the Lord God. And He is not like those foolish gods they believed in. As the author of Hebrews wrote, "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb 4:13). Don't fall into His hands in unbelief. He knows everything. —Everything about you, everything about your thoughts, your deeds, more about you than you possibly know about yourself. And some day, we all have to meet Him. It's with Him that, "we have to do." It's with Him we deal with.

Don't fall into His hands in unbelief: He is gracious; He is compassionate; He receives all who trust in Christ, His eternal Son. Believe, and receive from Him the free gift of eternal life. And then join in the psalmist's worship of Him, and praise His works—and His great work of saving your soul.

*(Closing prayer)* Father, we do praise You as Holy. We praise the Triune God as holy, and faithful, and merciful. We see that in the works of Your hand. We see that in the promises You've made in Scripture, and we thank You, Father, for Your grace and mercy which has brought us into a relationship with You through the shed blood of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank You for sending Him to die for us, to make us Your people, and to be so faithful to us. May we be faithful to You, be obedient to You, to follow You and Your instruction in a way that brings glory to You and blessing to those around us.

And now, the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you *Shalom*, Peace. In Christ's name, Amen.