Psalm 113 Sermon Manuscript

“Who Is Like Our God?”

 I want to start off by sharing a parable that the famous Danish theologian and philosopher wrote in one of his works called the “*Philosophical Fragments*.” Normally I try to say in my own words other people’s thoughts or words, but I want to read this to you because I don’t think I could phrase it in my own way that would make it more beautiful or more powerful than the original. “*Imagine there was a King who loved a humble maiden. She had no royal pedigree, no education, no standing in the royal court. She dressed in rags. She lived in a hovel; she lived the ragged life of a peasant. But for reasons no one could quite figure out, the King fell in love with this girl in the way the kings sometimes do. Why he should love her was beyond explaining, but love her he did, and he could not stop loving her.*

 *One day there awoke in the heart of the King an anxious thought: “How in the world is he going to reveal his love to this girl? How could he bridge the chasm that separated the two of them?” His advisers, of course, told him that all he had to do was command her to become his queen, and it would be done. For he was a man of immense power, every statesman feared his wrath, every foreign power trembled before him, and every courtier groveled in the dust at the King’s voice.*

 *This poor peasant girl would have no power to resist; she would have to become the queen! But power, even unlimited power, cannot command love. The King could force her body to be present in the palace, but he could not force love to be present in her heart. He might be able to gain her obedience this way but coerced submission is not what he wanted. He longed for intimacy of heart and oneness of spirit, and all the power in the world cannot unlock the human heart—it must be opened from within.*

 *So he met with his advisers once again and they suggested he try to bridge the chasm by elevating her to his position. He could shower her with gifts, dress her in purple and silk, and have her crowned the queen. But if he brought her to his palace, if he radiated the sun of his magnificence over her, if she saw all the wealth, pomp, and power of his greatness, then she would be overwhelmed. How would he ever know if she loved him for himself, or for all that he had given her? And how could she know that he loved her, and would love her still if she had remained only a humble peasant? Would she be able to summon confidence enough never to remember what the king only wished to forget—that he was the king and she had been a humble maiden?*

 *Every alternative he came up with came to nothing. There was only one way. So one day the king arose, took off his crown, relinquished his scepter, laid aside his royal robes, and he took upon himself the life of a peasant. He dressed in rags, scratched out a living in the dirt, groveled for food, and dwelt in hovel. He did not just take on the outward appearance of a servant, he became a servant–it was his actual life, his actual nature, his actual burden. He became as ragged as the one he loved so that she could be his forever. It was the only way. His raggedness became the very signature of his presence*…”

 That is what it was like for God to come down to the earth and become a man to live, suffer, and ultimately die for sinners like you and me. That is what it was like for someone who has infinite glory and power to willingly come down to veil his glory by taking on human flesh so that He could experience what we experience. And this is the kind of love that we have been marveling at all week along at Wonder Junction, the marvelous and wondrous love of Jesus Christ for us. And what God wants you to see today in this psalm is there is no other like Him…that He is unmatched in glory, power, and majesty that cannot be described adequately by human words or expressions. And yet, despite the fact that God is so infinitely higher above us, God wants you to see that He came all the way down to us to save us from our sin. He didn’t have to save us, but He chose to save us because He is a merciful and kind God.

 This psalm is broken down into three praises of God. The first is praising God for His great name, verses 1 through 3. The second is praising God that He is exalted far above the heavens, verses 4-6. And finally the third praise is praising God because He came down and He lifts us up, verses 7-9. Let’s look at the first praise, praising God for His great name, verses 1-3. Starting in verse 1: “*Praise Yah! Praise, O slaves of Yahweh, Praise the name of Yahweh. May the name of Yahweh be blessed from now until forever*. And here’s our VBS theme verse 3: “*From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of Yahweh is to be praised*.” In our culture, names are often just names. Sure every name usually as a meaning, but we typically don’t name our kids their given name because we know that that is their character. For example, I named Leon “Leon” because I wanted him to be as bold as a righteous lion talked about in Proverbs 28:1. That’s my desire for Him, to be a strong, masculine, and fearless man of God in a culture filled with weak, ungodly men. But I didn’t name “Leon” Leon because I knew ahead of time that Leon was absolutely, without a doubt going to be like that because salvation is in the hands of the Lord.

 But in the Bible, someone’s name was more than just their name. It usually characterized who they were. To give a negative example, in the Old Testament there was a person named Nabal who was described as foolishly opposed king David. He was a fool for acting against the king and Nabal’s wife Abagail apologized for her foolish husband’s actions. But if you look up the meaning of the name “Nabal” it literally means foolish or a fool. But the name Yahweh describes who God is in His essence. Yahweh comes from the verb “to be” a state of existence. Yahweh essentially means “I am that I am” and it was the name that He used to describe Himself to Moses through the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3. To say “I am that I am” is to say I am self-sufficient. Can you any of you say that you are self-sufficient? I’m not asking whether you guy kind can live independently from your parents but I’m asking can any of you live without breathing, eating, sleeping, going to the restroom? No right!? We are not self-sufficient in of ourselves, we are dependent on so many things for our survival.

 And all of the essential that we need to survive, air, water, food, our heart to keep beating and pumping an average of 2000 gallons of blood throughout our body every single day, do you know all of that is sustained and upheld by almighty God’s power? Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus Christ is the “*radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power*.” All of creation is dependent and looks up to God for its daily food. The seasons, the creatures of the earth, the tides of the oceans, all of creation looks to eternally existent one for its sustenance and existence. That is why we need to praise Yahweh and bless His name forever. And the phrase in verse 3 “From the rising of the sun to its setting” is a literary device called a merism which means everything that goes on between the sun rising and setting is to be done to the praise of God’s name.

But the psalmist doesn’t just stop there in describing the incomparable greatness of our God. It’s not only His name that says so much about God, it’s also where He is positioned. And that leads us to the second praise of God that He is exalted far above the heavens. Verses 4-6. “*Yahweh is high above all nations; His glory is above the heavens. Who is like Yahweh our God, the One who sits on high, The One who brings Himself low to see the things in heaven and on the earth*?” You remember the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11? The peoples of the earth thought they could ascend to heaven by creating a tall enough tower and they start attempting it. And then we are taken up to God’s perspective from heaven looking down and God says, “is that?....Is that humans trying to reach me and think they can be like me? Wait a minute I need to search for my magnifying glass because they are so puny and that tower looks like a little lego piece…it’s so small I need to magnify it to see. That is how we are compared to an infinitely exalted Lord of heaven and earth. He has to “stoop down, to get on his knees” so to speak to see what we are up to. And see even this language of God being infinitely above us fails to adequately describe the difference between God and us because by describing God as being infinitely greater and above us seems to imply that God is like us, but only infinitely greater than us, which is not the case. And it also assumes that God is just really far away that if SpaceX developed its rocket technology enough, we can rocket ourselves to find where God is living after all! No, no, no, not only is God infinitely greater and higher than us, He is UNLIKE us. He is a different kind than us. He is the only one of His category that exists. There is none other like Him. There is a kind that is “created,” but there is only one CREATOR! And even if hypothetically develops a rocket that can reach the end of “space” so to speak, they won’t find God! Because He exists outside the realm of space and time.

When Isaiah was lifted up in a vision to see God on His throne, He described God as high and lifted up on a throne, and the train of His robe filling the temple. Have you ever seen like on TV or in person maybe a king or a queen who had a majestic robe on, and the train of his or her robe was super long and it covered like 20 feet behind that person as they walked and there would be people behind the king/queen holding up the train of their robe to make sure it didn’t get caught on anything, etc.? Well no train of a king or queen comes close to matching the length of God’s train robe. God’s filled the entire temple! Really no words or pictures can adequately describe what God is like. We can only use analogies, illustrations and pictures to somewhat get a sense of the incomprehensible God. But yet, despite being so high and lifted up and existing outside the realm of space and time, God still cared about His creatures enough to stoop down to look at what His creation was up to and to help, lift, and exalt His people out of difficult places in life. What does He do? He does this: Verses 7-9 “*Who raises the poor from the dust and lifts high the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with nobles, with the nobles of His people. He makes the barren woman of the house sit as a glad mother of children. Praise Yah*!”

 The poor being in the dust and the needy being lifted up out of the ash heap are pretty strong images aren’t they? They were common Jewish expressions of a state of humility of neediness of being destitute, forsaken, because to be in the dust was a way of identifying as the dust of the earth because the Jews understood God created man originally out of dust or dirt. And an ash heap? We can figure what that conveys right? Think of the California fires, what’s left after a fire has consumed a house? Nothing but a pile of ashes, an ash heap. But yet God makes those who are in those positions of life to make them sit with nobles and the nobles of His people! God has physically done that with many of His people. Look at the life of Joseph in the book of Exodus. He was betrayed unto death by his brothers, sold into slavery to Egypt, was falsely accused of sexually assaulting Potiphar’s wife, and sent to prison for many years. Talk about sitting in the dust and ash heap, Joseph was one of those needy and poor that desperately needed God’s help. Yet, God released him from prison and had Joseph rise to the rank of the second most powerful man in Egypt, only second to Potiphar. God made Joseph sit with nobles.

 And not only that, in the history of His people Israel, He has caused barren women to conceive and become mothers of children which verse 9 might be a direct reference to Hannah in 1 Samuel. Hannah was married to her husband Elkanah who also had a second wife named Peninnah. He had two wives, not the most model husband you will find for marital faithfulness. (Joke: Camp Elkanah not a good name? Elkanah = “God has acquired/purchased”). Anyways, Peninnah had children through Elkanah but Hannah couldn’t conceive, and 1 Samuel describes Peninnah as constantly mocking and making fun of Hannah that she couldn’t have children like hers. You can imagine the miserable and stressful life Hannah had. But she poured out her heart to the Lord and asked if He gave her a child, she would dedicate her son to serving Him! And God answered her prayer and He allowed her to conceive and give birth to a boy named Samuel who would later become of one the greatest prophets in the Old Testament that would crown David as King. But the Lord gave Hannah the joy of being a mother to a child. And her song of praise is what we read for our Scripture reading this morning.

 But not only can God lift those like Hannah and Joseph out of the ash heap in a physical way and has done that, He can spiritually lift us out of whatever miry clay we might be in. You might be here today dealing with various issues in your life. Maybe you are plagued by your own sins and seem to not be able to get out of it. Maybe you are struggling with depressing thoughts and past traumatic experiences, or abuses, or sufferings in life that you haven’t moved on from. Maybe you are down because someone doesn’t like you and has said hurtful things to you in the past and you don’t know how to deal with them. You are sitting in spiritual dust and a spiritual ash heap of your own. Well let me tell you there is no ash heap or amount of sorrowful dust you can lay in that is too low for God to stoop down to lift you up from. The most marvelous aspect of it all, the most wondrous thing we learned in Wonder Junction is how this great God who is so high and lifted up not only stooped down to our level, but actually entered this world as one of us, subject to all the sufferings, trials, and sorrows of this world.

 Philippians 2:6-8 says this about Jesus, the second person of the Godhead… “*although existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a slave, by 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*.” What kind of a God would do such a thing as subject Himself to the limitations of His own creation? Do you see Allah do that? Do you see all any of the so called gods of the other religions doing something like this? The gods of the Greek religion certainly wouldn’t do that…that’s why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1 that the cross of Christ is foolishness to the Greeks. It doesn’t make sense to them at all why God would Himself become weak in order to save the weak. That’s why the prophet Micah in Micah 7:18-19 said this: “*Who is a God like You, who forgives iniquity And passes over the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance? He does not hold fast to His anger forever Because He delights in lovingkindness. He will again have compassion on us; He will subdue our iniquities. And You will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea.*”

 For those of you who have trusted in Jesus Christ, no trial, no suffering, no hardship you are going through is too low or too terrible for God to lift you up out of it. And even if He doesn’t lift you up out of it (because the Christian life does not guarantee that we will always be delivered out of whatever hardship we may face) God is willing and ready to come down to you through His Holy Spirit and put His arm under you, and lift you up to go through the trial together. And for those of you who have not turned from your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, God can save you from the ash heap of your sins, because that is what sin does…all it does is create nothing but destruction and misery in its path, leaving nothing of life after its rampage. Every time you sin, you are playing with fire, a fire that could swallow you in an instant and consume you in hell forever. But Jesus Christ, the Lion of righteousness, came down to earth, as the spotless Lamb of God, so that He would be butchered for your sins and for Him to be consumed by the blazing fire of the wrath of God that you and I deserved. He took your hell and gave you heaven instead. That is how much He loves you that He was willing to bring heaven down to you so that you would be lifted up with Him.

 Let me ask you a question: How can you NOT leave your life of sin and follow Jesus Christ after knowing all that He has done for you? If you were doing something reckless and something you weren’t supposed to be doing and you were unknowingly about to accidentally kill yourself, but someone saw it coming and saved you from your ill fate, wouldn’t you feel immensely grateful for that person saving your life? Would you just look at him and say “thanks, and just keep on doing your reckless act?” I don’t think so right? How much more should you be grateful for the eternal God of heaven sending His one and only son to die the death you deserved? And because of doing an impossible and unthinkable act of sacrifice, this is what God the Father’s response to His Son: Philippians 2:9-11 “*Therefore, God also 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*.” Who is like Yahweh our God? No one…absolutely no one.