

# Praise the Lord, All You Nations

Psalms 117 • 2022-12-24 • Christmas Eve



I can't claim to be much of a soccer fan, but it is fun to see how much excitement builds up around the world cup. There's something about a world-wide event that generates excitement. Nearly every nation in the world works to qualify for the competition. And people in nearly every nation in the world end up watching it. It may not seem obvious to many in the United States, but soccer is by far the world's most popular sport. So, when every nation attempts every four years to reach the very top, it is the most popular sporting event in the world. However, only around half of the nations have even qualified to compete in it. It has to be hard for some to get excited when they have never even seen their nation make it to the competition. Others, with the business of life, might not have even noticed unless they glanced at the front page of the news. The world cup just didn't make any difference in their lives.

Do you suppose that some people might feel that same lack of enthusiasm regarding Christmas? After all, so much of the message of Christmas seems to center on the small nation of ancient Israel. And not every nation participates with the same enthusiasm. You will find Christians in some nations, but their numbers are so small that the celebration of Christmas hardly comes up. And I'm sure there are many in our nation who wonder year after year why they should get excited about something like Christmas. They don't have the home, the family, or the background that has celebrated it much. Of course, many haven't celebrated it much apart from perhaps the commercial fervor of spending money and eating more food. What's to get excited about? And how about you? Christians consider it one of our major religious festivals. But it comes up every year. Might you find yourself getting more excited some years about things like the World Cup? Or maybe the real excitement for you has been the latest news instead of the same story that you have heard year after year. Is there anything that makes a difference from the previous years?

This Christmas evening, we see in one chapter of the Bible just why you, I, and all the world have reason to be excited about Christmas. And that reason remains the same today and forever! And don't worry. It won't take us all night. In fact, we'll be looking at the shortest chapter of the Bible, Psalm 117.

Even though this is the shortest Psalm and shortest chapter of the Bible, it contains the heart of Scripture. The Psalm begins with a call for praise to the Lord. This Psalm was written in ancient Israel and first given to the people of Israel. But it goes far beyond them. It is a call for all nations and all people to praise the Lord. "Praise the Lord, all you nations...all people." This is the way that Scripture always speaks. It includes everyone in the world. The first man and woman were not Israelites. They are the parents of us all. And we all share the same creator God.

He identified himself with the title and name Lord. We sometimes see this title translated as "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." The title Lord comes from how Jesus and the apostles used the term. They followed the Greek translators of the Old Testament and used the term which we translate in English as "Lord."

The Lord identifies himself as the God of Israel. And he even first makes his name known to them as "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." He spoke to their forefathers and gave them his Word. But throughout Scripture he includes all nations. He does this because there is no other god. He alone is God. And although he spoke through Israel, his Word extends to all people. He told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's offspring. He spoke through his prophets of the judgment God brings against the sin of every nation -including Israel. And he promised through the prophets of Israel that he would send a ruler who would be over all nations. Once he spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying that it would be too small a thing for him to merely be a Savior-God to Israel. He says that his salvation will reach the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49) King David was told of a ruler who would come from his offspring. That ruler wouldn't just rule over Israel. He would rule over all nations. The second Psalm talks about all nations and all people worshipping the Son of God.

You see, it doesn't matter what your background, nationality, or family history is. You and all the world are commanded and invited to praise the Lord. He is your God. And whether you or anyone else is excited about celebrating Christmas or not, Psalm 117 is for you. It tells you to "Praise the Lord."

To "praise" and "extol" the Lord means to speak of his goodness. It means to boast about him. Those who are excited about a super-star soccer player will boast about his play in a game. The people of this world are invited to boast about the Lord and his works. You are called to speak of the goodness and amazing works of your God, the Lord.

The center of the Psalm gives us the reason for praise. It is interesting to note that the reason for boasting about the Lord also happens to be the very center of the center chapter of the Bible. Of course, the chapter numbers are not part of the original inspired text. But it is still interesting to know that as they are numbered in our Bible this shortest Psalm contains the middle. And right in the middle of that is the beating heart of Scripture: "For great is his love toward us." That's a pretty fitting coincidence.

The Hebrew word here for love also contains our concept of mercy. I like how one translation phrased this, “his mercy overwhelms us.” The reason we boast about the goodness of God is his great love and mercy for sinners! His mercy and love are found all across the pages of Scripture. It is displayed in his patience, his undeserved gifts, and his compassion for his creation.

This great love is for all of us. It is for you. You never have to wonder if Christmas is worth getting excited over. It is the greatest news of mercy and love that you will ever receive. At times we might feel more like we should read, “great is his anger towards us.” We feel the curse of sin as our bodies struggle against sickness. We feel the pain of loss as loved ones die and we are left with an empty seat next to us at home. We feel the anger of a holy God against sin as we tremble at the thought of what he might do on account of us. And I’m sure that some of these things have at times softened or even caused your praise of the Lord to cease. But the truth is that as sinners we rightly deserve such wrath and punishment. We deserve great justice and great pain. We haven’t praised or obeyed the Lord. We have turned against him. This world has turned against him! But this Psalm has good news for you this Christmas! “Great is his love toward us!” Our sin is great, but his mercy greater!

That love was so great for you and all the world that God planned out the greatest act of love this world will ever know. The Son of God came down from his heavenly throne to become a man. When the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest,” they were praising the Son of God who became the lowliest. There, in the manger, Joseph and Mary placed the most beloved and holy Son of God in human flesh. But the Lord loved us so much he gave his Son. And the Son loved us so much he came to us to save us. The angels called for all people to join in praise with them!

The greatness of his love is seen in his incarnation, taking on human flesh. He did it in love to bring us what he promised in mercy. All the pain, all the curse, all the sin of the world was placed on his shoulders. And he bore that sin and its great justice for us on the cross! God so loved the world, all people, that he gave his one and only Son.

It’s not just the same message that you can receive without excitement. It’s not just a message for those with a Christian background or from a nation with many Christians. It is a message for you, and for all! “Great is his love toward us. He sent his Son!”

And it isn’t just something to get excited about once and slowly lose excitement about year after year. It is good news that lasts into eternity! “*The faithfulness of the Lord endures forever!*” God was faithful in fulfilling his promise to send his Son. His Son was faithful in coming to endure the cross. He faithfully fulfilled all that God in mercy has foretold. He faithfully rose from the grave. And he faithfully lives forever to keep all God’s promises to us! Because of his overwhelming mercy for us, you will praise the Lord tonight and into all eternity!

But all nations and all people can’t praise the Lord unless they hear about his great love and his unending faithfulness. This call to “praise the Lord” must ring out through those who know it. Praise him to spread the good news about the Lord your God. More will join in praise. It is a message of praise for your neighbor who might only be celebrating cookies and cake tonight. It is a message for your family member who might only be celebrating his bank account and his own temporary comforts this year. It is a message for those who groan under the pain of the curse of sin and don’t feel like praising God. It is a message for those who feel loss, heartache, and fear. “Praise the Lord!” When the Son came into the world, the Shepherds spread the news. The news is still spread to all nations by those who believe!

I had said that this short Psalm contains some of the basic truths of all of Scripture. Take one more look at it to see how many times the title Lord occurs. You’ll see that “Yah” or “Yahweh” comes up three times. Praise the Lord! God the Father is our Creator and planned out our rescue from sin. He sent his Son because his mercy and love is so great for all. He wants all to be saved. God the Son came in love to this world. In un failing faithfulness and truth, he fulfilled all the promises given to us! He came to live, die, and rise again. And in faithfulness he will return in glory. And the Lord, the Holy Spirit conveys this truth through the gospel, written down by the prophets and apostles. “Praise the Lord!” Good news! His love is great, and his faithfulness is everlasting!

It’s really only a small bit of trivia to know this chapter is the center of our Bible. But really, Christ is the center of Scripture. And it all centers on him coming down to us because of his great love for us. It all centers on what we celebrate and get excited about tonight, and it carries on forever with his faithfulness. It is a short chapter. Let’s listen one more time as we reflect on the greatness of his love and faithfulness found in his Son, born to save. And let’s continue forever with excitement and praise to his name!

Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.

For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

Praise the LORD.

הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כְּלַגּוֹיִם שְׂבַחֻהוּ כְּלַהֲאֻמִּים: כִּי גָבַר עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדּוֹ וְאַמְתִּיּוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּ־יְהוָה: