

Psalm 148

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[0 : 0 0] I'm going to read Psalm 148 to you. This is a psalm that should help us learn more about praising God and hopefully we'll enter into the spirit of that psalm.

So Psalm 148. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels. Praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

Praise him, sun and moon. Praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created, and he established them forever and ever. He issued a decree that will never pass away.

Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, you mountains and all seas, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children.

[1 : 5 3] Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted. His splendor is above the earth and the heavens, and he has raised up for his people a horn.

The praise of all his faithful servants of Israel, the people close to his heart. Praise the Lord.

I wonder what excites you, infatuates you, what you think about constantly, perhaps when you go to sleep, when you wake up in the morning.

What do you view as being most important to you? What do you think about? What do you speak about most? Who or what do you praise most in your speech?

Psalm 148 reminds us that the Lord alone deserves praise, especially by his people. The book of Psalms captures the varied experiences of godly people, that is, those that delight in God's word, that meditate on it, and trust in him.

[3 : 1 4] That's the nature of the people of God. But the climax to the Psalms consists of a number of Psalms that urge the faithful to praise the Lord. And Psalm 148 is one of those.

It starts with the words, praise the Lord. The last three words are, praise the Lord. So there's no doubt about what this psalm is about and what it's encouraging us to do.

But who is to praise the Lord? The first six verses belong by themselves in one sense, and they focus upon heavenly things.

Beings that have a permanence about them. Things like the sun, the moon, the stars, the sky, and the angels that don't die like we do.

Verse 5 says, Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at his command they were created, and he established them forever and ever.

[4 : 2 4] He issued a decree that will never pass away. Now for centuries, men, women, and children, wise men, ordinary people, have looked up to the sky and have been fascinated by their heavenly bodies.

Constellations or groups or patterns of stars in the sky look the same today as they did thousands of years ago.

We describe them in exactly the same way that the Greeks spoke about them. And the Greeks were in their imagination. They looked up at some of those pans of stars and they saw a great bear.

Or perhaps they looked up and saw a man that looked like a hunter with his belt clearly visible. These things are permanent there in the sky.

They're unchanging. Navigators have used a fixed pole star to point out the direction of north. And keen astronomers know where to find the stars in the night sky.

[5 : 35] They might use a book of tables to predict where to point their telescope and see small stars, planets, comets that appear in the sky.

And you can even point a telescope in the daytime up there in the blue. And the star that they're looking for will be seen there in the daytime.

And that's because these things are fixed. Now we can't see them, of course, normally, without the aid of a powerful telescope. But nonetheless, they're there.

They're fixed points in the sky. And at a simpler level, many newspapers carry a picture showing the map of the sky. And you don't even have to be an astronomer to work out where the sun rises and where it sets.

You know the path of the sun. And you know how the sun dominates the sky during the daytime and the moon at night. And even the changing appearance of the moon is predictable.

[6 : 44] And many diaries will tell you when it's going to be full moon or half moon. There's a permanence about these things. But sadly, men and women have got this wrong.

They look for permanence and reliability in a changing world that disturbs them. And they confuse these things.

And they worship the sun, the moon, and the planets, and the stars. And even today, strangely, some people think that their future depends upon the position of those heavenly bodies.

And they forget the eternal and changing God, the Lord over all. He's established the position of these celestial bodies. He's determined their paths across their sky.

And they fail to worship him. And not only guides the planets in their orbits, but also the history of men and women and nations and each one of us.

[7 : 52] And we don't worship him. We fall short in this matter. And foolishly, heavenly bodies have been made into gods. But you don't worship such things, do you?

Or do you? Do you gaze in wonderment at the night sky without recognizing the creator? Do you give glory to him when you see the amazing view when you look up against the black sky?

And what about sunsets? Do you gaze in wonderment at these things without considering the Lord who created the clouds of water droplets and dust?

The different wavelengths of light. And make such sunsets possible. And your eyes. God made those so that you can see the beauty.

But wait a minute. Do you dismiss these things as natural phenomenon that somehow come together by chance? Do you worship the creation rather than the creator?

[9 : 10] Are you taken up by the wisdom of the world which views them as just coming about by chance? And you brush your shoulders and you admire the view.

But then you turn away without seeing the glory of the creator who made these things. We know that the radiation from the sun provides the necessary heat and light for vegetation to grow.

We know about the tilt of the earth on its axis that makes our seasons. And the rotation of the earth that makes day and night and prevents half the world becoming too hot and the other half too cold.

We know about these things. We know about these things. But are they just mechanistic? Who designed these things? Do you worship God as you think of the way in which he's created this wonderful planet on which we live?

With the times and the seasons. Daytime and night time and all the glory that we behold. Do you fear a stray comet striking the earth during your lifetime and destroying it?

[10 : 34] Where is your confidence? Do you see God's hand in upholding the universe? Now the psalmist urges sun, moon and stars to praise the Lord.

It's rich poetry. But is it just poetry? These amazing objects of creation owe everything to the Lord.

In a sense they should praise the Lord. But they're essentially inanimate. Non-living. Non-speaking objects.

Non-speaking objects. They don't use words like we do. They cannot literally praise the Lord. But you and I can. We can praise the Lord on their behalf.

So do you praise the Lord for the reliable, beautiful, life-enhancing heavenly bodies? Is the psalmist shaming you and I by exhorting the heavenly bodies themselves to worship the Lord?

[11 : 36] Because we fail to do so. But notice that the psalmist doesn't start the psalm by urging praise for and on behalf of the celestial bodies that we're so familiar with.

He urges the heavenly host of angels to praise the Lord. To praise the Lord. Why did he do that? Well, he knows that they're better at it than we are.

We're exhorted to praise the Lord and we know that we should do. But we're so feeble at it. Our prayer times are so full of requests.

Like endless shopping lists. And there's so little time given for thanksgiving, never mind praise. By the way, have you ever thought about the difference between praise and thanksgiving?

We should be thankful for the blessings that we receive in answer to prayer. And the abundant blessings and good things that we receive that we never pray for.

[12 : 51] But is such thanksgiving praise? Isn't praise a rejoicing and boasting and acknowledgement that God is eternally unchanging, wise and good in himself?

It isn't praise a confident rejoicing in the grace, kindness and faithfulness of God. It's Godhood. Now, a man might be very thankful for the good things that his wife does for him.

But that actually falls very short of rejoicing in the good qualities and character of his wife. The Lord gives good gifts because he is unchangeably good in himself.

He is a fount of goodness. Now, the heavenly hosts of angels recognize this. And their praise is not brought about by their receiving good things.

They're not self-orientated like we are. They're God-worshipping. God-serving. God-delighting.

[14 : 10] And not spoiled by sin and pride and selfishness like we are. They see God as he really is. And they never doubt him or mistrust him.

And so they praise him perfectly. The psalmist knows that God is worthy of worship. But he also knows that despite his every effort, his praise is imperfect.

He's just like us. He knows that we should worship God with all our being, heart, soul, mind and strength. But we fall short. And so in his weakness, he turns to others who can praise the Lord unfettered by sin.

He asks for help. Verse 2. Praise him all, his angels. Praise him all, his heavenly host. And the best and the most skillful and even the most godly human choirs fall far short of the heavenly host.

The angelic choirs do the work faultlessly. And so the psalmist asks them to praise the Lord.

[15 : 28] To do that which he cannot do perfectly for himself. Indeed, he's so far aware of his own shortcomings. It's a bit like us.

You know, sometimes there's a job to do. And we think, well, let's do it. But I don't have the strength. I don't have the wisdom. I know. There's someone over there.

Uncle Jim or whoever. He'll do it for me. Well, it's a bit like that. And so the psalmist calls upon the angels themselves, the heavenly host, to do what he himself cannot do.

And then the psalmist descends to earthly but still impressive things. In verse 7, he urges, praise the Lord from the earth.

See, he's come down now from up there to here on earth. But he includes great and mighty things like great sea creatures, lightning, hail, snow, clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding.

[16 : 40] And we know a lot. And we know a lot about stormy winds. We're reminded constantly on the TV about these things. And mountains and hills, big, impressive things.

And he asked them to praise the Lord. And many of these things are life-changing, even history-changing things. Lightning.

We've been reminded recently of how Luther was absolutely terrified by that lightning bolt that came down by him.

What did he do? Well, ultimately, he became a monk. And then the Lord dealt with him. He became a teacher of the Bible. And we had the Reformation lightning.

World-changing, history-changing things. And then armies have been defeated by inhospitable snow-covered ranges of mountains. Think about how the Spanish Armada was destroyed by a storm.

[17 : 39] Even in the 20th century, armies had been bogged down in mud and snow. Think about Jonah. Think about how Jonah came to repentance in a strange sea creature that the Lord had specially prepared for him.

And as a result, Nineveh, likewise, was brought to repentance and delivered from destruction. These things that the psalmist was talking about here are massive, earth-shattering things.

But then there are other things. Things which have been such a blessing to the nations. He talks about fruit trees, cattle, cedar trees. The latter being used for building palaces.

And we can read about that in the Old Testament. And then cedar log cabins, even today. Now, like the celestial objects in the sky, the sun and the moon and so on, these things don't speak.

They cannot intelligently or willfully praise God. They don't have the gift of language like we do. And yet they powerfully speak of the kindness, faithfulness, wisdom and skill of their maker.

[18 : 52] All creatures, great and small, wild animals, large animals, small animals, domestic animals, they all proclaim the wisdom of God, but in a passive way.

You and I have the responsibility and the privilege of actively, intelligently and creatively praising God in speech and song and prayer with words that can be understood by others.

We can use our eyes and ears and powers of observation and intellect to perceive what God is like. But sadly, we don't always, do we?

Do we ever so rarely look at these things and worship God for his greatness, his magnificence, his power, his wisdom, his faithfulness, his kindness, his love?

Do they have that effect upon us? Do we ever so rarely look at these things? And because we're so slow at seeing these things, the Lord has given us his word, like spectacles to see things that we wouldn't normally be able to see.

[20 : 08] And the word of God tells us about God and it's meant to inspire us to praise and worship God for what he's really like.

Now, we have memories and creative ability to praise God, but when it comes to praise, are we really better than silent trees and dumb animals?

Years ago, I read of a Scottish shepherd who was burdened to preach. The one thing he really wanted to do was to preach and to preach the glory of God and those things that God has done, those things that God has promised, those things that God will bring about.

He was just a young shepherd boy without influence. And the only congregation that he could muster was sheep. And so he preached to the sheep.

What did he find with those sheep? Well, he would just stand there, chewing the cud or whatever. Just rest there, motionless, dumb.

[21 : 19] When you've looked at the face of sheep, don't you see glazed eyes? I have a feeling that when Peter looks on a congregation, he sees glazed eyes, just like those sheep.

Now, the sheep might, of course, be exhorted not to go wandering off. They might be exhorted to praise the God who made them. But aren't we a bit like that?

We wander off and we don't repent. We're told of the glories of God and we don't praise. The sheep didn't respond to the preaching with joy or thanksgiving.

And what about people? If people won't listen to the gospel with thankfulness and praise and turn from those things which are wrong, the preacher may as well content himself in talking to domestic animals or wild animals for that or plants to respond.

The challenge here is this. Are you different from these other creatures? Remember when Jesus spoke to the crowds in Galilee and chided them for being unresponsive to his message?

[22 : 43] Matthew 11, 14. He spoke like this. To what can I compare this generation? They're like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to others, we played the pipe for you and you didn't dance.

We sang a dirge and you didn't mourn. They didn't join in the games. They were unresponsive. And sometimes children don't join in games that are set up for them.

Too much bother. And the hearers of Jesus were just like that. They didn't listen to the message of John the Baptist when he brought the message of repentance.

They didn't listen to Jesus. Two completely different personalities. And they didn't listen. They had eyes but didn't see. Ears that didn't hear.

How sad. Now the psalmist then turned his attention to kings and princes. The great and the good, if you like. The makers and the shakers of this world.

[23 : 46] Verse 11. Praise the Lord, kings of the earth and all nations. You princes and all rulers on earth. Surely it was befitting to exhort such important persons to praise the Lord with all their wisdom, all their abilities, all their wealth, all the good things that had been given, and to enter into this matter of giving glory to God.

And isn't it true that people follow those who are looked up to as being the great and the good. The trendsetters of society. National politicians, local government leaders, those who are influential in the media, teachers and heads of families, have a special responsibility to praise the Lord and be examples to others in humbly exalting God.

What about church leaders? What about those who are older in the Christian life? Who have listened to the word of God for years and decades?

Haven't they also, haven't we also, gotten a special responsibility to exemplify what it means to praise the Lord? Why is it so difficult to praise the Lord?

Well, one problem is the problem of pride. We're puffed up with ourselves. And powerful, rich, wise people don't look up.

[25 : 35] They might look down on the masses. They don't usually look up. They don't see the glory of God. And it's the same with all who don't praise the Lord.

It's the same problem with ordinary men and women and children, whether rich or poor, great or small, or as the psalmist puts it, young men, women, old men and children, young men, full of strength and vitality and confidence about the future, don't look up.

Old men may rejoice in past achievements, but don't look up. Proud, judgmental people, ordinary people, look down on others.

They don't look up. Listen how the psalmist tells the great, the good, young and old to look up. Verse 11. Kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on the earth, young men and women, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord.

And here we've got the key point. For his name alone is exalted. His splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

[27 : 03] So have you looked up? Have you seen the glory of God? Where do you see the glory of God?

Where is it revealed? It's a great lesson to read about the experience of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 6.

He saw the Lord high and exalted, seated on a throne. In John's gospel, there's a commentary on the experience of Isaiah.

And the Lord made it clear that Isaiah saw the glory of Jesus and spoke of him. The same chapter in John's gospel quoted the words of Jesus shortly before his crucifixion, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

He's speaking about his cross. So what's your attitude to the cross of Christ? The apostle Paul spoke of the glory of God.

[28 : 22] 1 Corinthians chapter 2 spoke of the cross. When I came to you, I didn't come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.

For I was all to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. When Jesus was raised up, he'd draw all men to himself.

Now the kings of the earth generally did not see the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 8.

None of the rulers of this earth, none of the rulers of this age understood it. For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

They didn't see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In his gospel, John wrote, chapter 1 verse 14, the word, that's Jesus, became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[29 : 31] We've seen his glory, John wrote, the glory of the one and only son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So have you looked up and seen the glory of Christ? That will loosen your tongues to praise God. So why do you find it so difficult to praise God?

Could I put it to you that you don't really know him very well? How can you know the Lord and not praise him?

You might say that you know the Lord. Yeah, but do you? How well do you know the Lord? You can't praise someone that you're ignorant of or you barely know.

You'd agree that's absolutely logical. And so if you don't praise the Lord, what's the problem? It must be that you don't know him as you should.

[30 : 41] The Apostle Paul prayed for the Christians at Colossae and one of the big things that he prayed for these believers, these believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, was that they might know him, that they might know him better.

And that's our need, is it not? That we know the Lord. And then we'll praise him. We'll speak well of him to others. Our tongues will be unloosed.

Perhaps you've never really praised God from the heart. Could it be that you just don't know him?

You've never known him. You've never seen the glory of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, in his love and care for you, in dying for you, taking your place, bearing your sins in his own body.

It might be that you're a respectable, hard-working person, a person that goes out of your way to do good to others and for others, but you don't find that you've got the strength to praise the Lord.

[32 : 00] The prophet Ezekiel was told to preach to dry bones. And if you're honest, you might describe yourself as being spiritually dry, just like dry bones, without joy, without praise, without life.

So, where do you turn to find strength to praise the Lord? It's a difficult thing.

It's something that doesn't come naturally to us. Where do we turn to find that strength? Well, verse 14, the Lord has raised up for his people a horn.

I'll say more about that in a moment. The praise of all his faithful servants. It might be that your Bible has a footnote which says, horn here, symbolizes strength.

The Lord has given his people strength. All his people, the praise of his faithful servants. And it's those who are faithful, who have faith, who will know the strength in the horn that the Lord raises up.

[33 : 17] It's a very telling passage at the beginning of Luke's Gospel in chapter 2. Be aware about the, you'll be aware of the father of John the Baptist who was rendered dumb.

Luke chapter 2, verse 64. He was suddenly given the gift of speech. Let me read this. immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue was set free, and he began to speak, praising God.

And then, really importantly, in verse 67, that's Luke 2, verse 67, the father of John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, what did he say?

Praise to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us.

So who was the horn of salvation? Clearly not John the Baptist, because John the Baptist said he wasn't the Christ, he wasn't the one to come, and that one was to come after him, the straps of whose sandals he wasn't worthy to untie.

[34 : 30] And when you read the Gospels, it's immediately apparent that Jesus is the horn of salvation. He is the one who gives strength and power to those who are weak, those who are dry, to those who receive him.

He's the one that the psalmist speaks of in verse 14. He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants.

Now you might object and say the psalmist is speaking in the past tense. He has raised up for us people a horn. Past tense, raised up.

True. But with the Lord, his promises are as good as done. The people of faith look upon his promises in that way.

And you know yourself that sometimes we say that if so-and-so says they'll do it, this powerful, trustworthy person, then you know it's as good as done.

[35 : 37] And you trust those whose word is as good as their deed. So why not believe in the one who is the horn of salvation? The faithful Old Testament believers look down through the centuries for this horn that would liberate them and give them spiritual strength.

The Apostle Paul, a New Testament preacher and writer, looking back to the cross, wrote to the Christians who lived in Rome, Romans 5, verse 6, you see, just at the right time, when we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Who is the psalmist actually exhorting to praise the Lord? It's someone who has spiritual strength. It's one of those who is described as his faithful servants.

Those who trust in him should praise the Lord. Notice how they're described in verse 14. They are the people close to his heart.

They're the apple of his eye. And if you're one of those who takes God at his word, who believes his gospel, who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, that describes you.

[37 : 04] You're special. Very interesting to hear unusual surnames. I have one in mind that's fairly rare and very quaint.

It seems very old-fashioned. But way back, centuries ago, people were given names that carried meaning, even spiritual meaning.

And the name that I have in mind is rare because the owner of that surname was embarrassed to own it and had it changed.

Very frequently, people change their name because they're embarrassed about it. Well, what's the name I've got in mind? Well, it's the name Well Beloved.

Have you come across that name? Maybe not. But if you go on Google, do a search on Well Beloved, you'll come across people called Well Beloved.

[38 : 15] So, are you Well Beloved? If you are, praise the Lord. Let's praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord Jesus Christ as we sing of him. our final hymn, 179. Praise him, praise him, Jesus, our blessed Redeemer.

Sing of earth his wonderful love proclaim. Let's rise to sing 179. 179. Praise him, praise him, Jesus, our blessed Redeemer.

Sing of earth his wonderful love proclaim. Hail, hail, hail, him, Christ, our faithful and glory.

Strength and glory leh cannot drum give to go, the juice and glory would still love and glory.

[39 : 51] Geez, The mountains of Zion Praise Him, praise Him Ever in joyful storm Praise Him, praise Him Jesus our blessed Redeemer For our sins He suffered and had and died The hour of love Of eternal salvation Hail Him, hail Him Jesus the blessed night Loving Savior With the enduring sorrow Wrath with love And crying is His crown Once for us Rejected, despised, and forsaken

Prince of glory And the triumphant love Praise Him, praise Him Jesus our blessed Redeemer Heavenly Father Jesus the blessed Lord Love in whose earnest free Jesus the Savior Reigneth forever and ever Round Him, crown Him Covenant and priest and King Death is found and rich Telling the joy Telling the joy be faithful Where is now Thy victory Most in grave Jesus lives No longer Thy waters are jealous Jesus lives

No more He has come to save Let's pray Let's pray Gracious God, we thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ For that inexpressible gift of your love And we pray that you'll help us to meditate on him Learn more of him, rejoice in him And we pray that as we look upon him We might find our tongues loosened To praise you To praise you with all our hearts Forgive us for falling so short, so often And we pray that we might learn to honour you in this world Amen And now to the King Eternal, immortal, invisible The only God May honour and glory Forever and ever

Amen