

September 6, 2020

LET EVERYTHING PRAISE THE LORD

Psalm 150

(7 of 8 in a series of selected Psalms)

In his 1993 book on missions, titled, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, John Piper famously opened with these words: “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. . . . When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.”¹ He then goes on to cite Psalm 67 in which the psalmist asks for God’s saving power to be known among the nations *so that* the peoples of the earth might praise God.

Not only do I think Piper is right in that statement, but the reality is that he could have cited much more than Psalm 67. The truth is that all of the Bible points us to the reality that history is leading to and will culminate in the day when God will be praised by everything and everyone (whether they are his enemies or his children). We saw that in the text that opened our service, as Paul writes in Philippians 2:10-11 that the day is coming when “at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

But this reality that all of history is heading toward the climax of God being praised is perhaps no more clearly seen than in the book of Psalms. And by that I don’t simply mean a psalm here or there that calls us to praise the Lord but the entirety of the Psalter itself. You may be familiar with the fact that the book of 150 Psalms is arranged and divided into five “books.” Most Bibles will have, for example, the heading above Psalm 1 that says “Book one.” And this first book of the psalms runs all the way through Psalm 41. And notice how this first book ends. We read in Psalm 41:13, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.” Then, we see that book two begins with Psalm 42, and it will run all the way through Psalm 72. And notice how it ends as well. Psalm 72:18-19 reads, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!” Now, there is an editorial note there in verse 20, which probably signifies that at one point there was an early (shorter) collection of psalms made up of those psalms written by David, which concluded with Psalm 72. But nonetheless, you can see how these first two books of the psalms build to the point of praising God. And it doesn’t stop there.

Book three, which ends with Psalm 89 likewise ends with the declaration, “Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen” (89:52). Then, book four, which ends with Psalms 106 concludes in verse 48, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.

people say, ‘Amen! Praise the Lord.’” By this point, I’m sure you’re anticipating hearing that book five ends with praise to the Lord as well. And indeed it does, but it does more than that. Book five actually ends with five psalms that praise the Lord, each beginning and ending with the refrain, “Praise the LORD!” And the last of these five psalms—Psalm 150—which not only ends book five but the entire Psalter—itself begins and ends with that refrain—Praise the LORD!—and every verse is filled with a call to praise the Lord.

In other words, it’s not simply that the end of every book points us to the culmination of praise to God, but the Psalter builds and builds until it is like the finale of a fireworks show, with praise to God filling every chapter and every verse, ending with the call for everything that has breath to praise the LORD. And if the Psalter is given to us as a picture in some sense of the believer’s journey—through sorrow and lament, struggle and imprecation, joy and thanksgiving—then this arrangement of the Psalter is providing for us an overwhelming declaration that every second of history—as dark as it might be on occasion—is building to the day when everyone and everything will praise our God. This is where history is moving.

And the obvious implication for us right now is that we should be a people who praise God. As we look at Psalm 150, we’re going to see some specifics about praising God, but prior to diving in, this should acknowledge that the expectation for believers is that we praise God. I’ve said before, but I believe that as Christians we should orient our lives around gathering with the Lord’s people on the Lord’s day and corporately declaring the praises of our God. And in this way, week by week, we’ll be a picture of the glorious and eternal praise to come that Psalm 150 points us toward.

With that, let’s turn our attention now to the specifics of Psalm 150. And basically what we’ll see is that the psalm is bracketed by an exhortation to praise God. We see the refrain, “Praise the Lord” at the beginning and end of the psalm. Then, in between those two refrains, we see the psalmist telling us where, why, how, and by whom God should be praised. First, we see that God is to be praised everywhere.

God is to be praised everywhere

The psalmist begins by writing, “Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens” (v. 1). Now, sometimes Hebrew poetry will say two different things but mean the same thing, just with different words. It might be like me saying, “I’m thankful for you all; I’m grateful for this congregation.” Although those two statements contain different words, the meaning of each is the same. And that may well be what’s going on here. It could well be that the psalmist means the same thing by sanctuary and mighty heavens. After all, we know from Psalm 2 that God sits in the heavens. So the reference to sanctuary may well be a reference to his heavenly sanctuary.

However, God’s sanctuary could also refer to his earthly dwelling in the temple, in the most holy place. And actually I think that is what is being referenced here. The main reason to think this is because the rest of the psalm pictures us using instruments and our breath to praise God—most

likely a reference to earthly worship. And if that indeed is the case, then verse 1 tells us that God should be worshiped on earth and in heaven. In other words, he should be praised everywhere.

This is a reality that the angelic beings understand. We're told in Isaiah's vision (in Isaiah 6) that the seraphim surround the throne, declaring praise to God, as they cry, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Is 6:3). We know from John's vision of heaven in Revelation 4 that these heavenly creatures "never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come'" (Rev 4:8). Similarly, there are myriads of angels in John's vision, saying with loud voices, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev 5:12). In other words, those beings in heaven are fully aware of the reality that God deserves eternal, unceasing praise, and they provide it. Psalm 150 is telling us on earth that we should join them in praising God as well.

Obviously this includes our gathering and singing praises to him as we've done this morning and will do again at the end of our service, but it also includes living a life of praise. In other words, if the angelic beings understand that there is nothing more deserving of their time and effort than praising the Almighty God, then you and I should understand that there is nothing more deserving of occupying the aim and intent of our lives than bringing praise and honor to our Lord. So, let us ask ourselves if our lives result in praise of God—not simply from our lips but also from the lips of others who see our lives. Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount that it is when others see our good works—our lives of loving our Lord—that they will glorify our Father who is in heaven. Let us make the aim of our lives to praise and bring praise to God. Let it be a true representation of our hearts when we pray (as the Lord instructed), "Father, hallowed (i.e. honored, praised) be your name." And, parents, as we raise our children, may this be our highest aim for their lives, not that they might be wealthy or successful or popular, but that they might have hearts that above all are driven to praise and lead others to praise our great God. He is to be praised in heaven and on earth. Second, we see that he is to be praised for who he is and what he has done.

God is to be praised for who he is and what he has done

We see in verse 2 that it's no longer telling us where to praise God (*in* his sanctuary and *in* his mighty heavens) but why. We are told, "Praise him *for* his mighty deeds; praise him *according to* his excellent greatness." We might summarize these exhortations by saying that we praise him for what he has done (his mighty deeds) and for who he is (his excellent greatness).

In case we need a reminder for why God should be praised, let us start with where verse 2 starts—considering his mighty deeds. He is first our creator. He is the one who has created the world and each of us and who holds every cell in our bodies together. Every good and perfect gift we have in life—from the sun to the rain to food to shelter and everything else—comes from him. And that's just considering his creating and preserving activity. We also know his redeeming work.

As Paul tells us in Romans 5, it was while we were sinners (“still enemies” as Paul says) that he demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son to live, die, and be raised for us. He not only bore the punishment for our sins (as we saw last week in Psalm 22) but he opened our eyes to his glory, credited Christ’s righteousness to us, forgave our sins, and put his Spirit within us so that we might know that we are his. That is sufficient for eternal praise, but (as the psalmist implies) what God does flows out of who he is. Through the prophet Jeremiah, the Lord declares that he who boasts should boast “that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight” (Jer 9:23-24). Again, the Lord acts in accord with who he is.

And throughout the Scripture, the Lord unveils to us his character (his “excellent greatness”). As Moses asked the Lord to reveal to him his glory, the Lord passed by him proclaiming, telling Moses who he is. Now, just pause for a second and imagine you’re hearing this for the first time. This is who the Almighty Creator whom the angelic beings ceaselessly praise in heaven tells us he is. He says, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation” (Ex 34:6-7).

Interestingly, as David writes Psalm 86 and declares why God should be worshiped, he returns to God’s self-revelation in Exodus 34, writing in Psalm 86:15, “You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.” Later, in Psalm 103:8, David again declares, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” As his children, this is who our Father wants us to know that he is. Yes, he is absolutely holy, and his judgment will be fierce and furious. That’s what the end of Exodus 34:7 shows us. But he is the God who relates to us his children in mercy, grace, slowness to anger, with his steadfast love abounding toward us, faithful, and forgiving our iniquity and sin.

I wonder if one reason our lives might not be filled with praise to God is because we fail to realize just how glorious he is in his excellent greatness. In Isaiah 55, the Lord tells the wicked to forsake his way and return to the Lord so that God might have compassion on him, “for he will abundantly pardon.” Then the Lord adds, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:6-9). It is in this context of God talking about showing compassion, mercy, grace, and forgiveness to the one who forsakes sin that the Lord says that his thoughts and ways are higher than ours, indeed as high as the heavens are above the earth. In other words, he is so much more compassionate and merciful and gracious and loving toward us than we can imagine he would be, that it’s almost beyond our comprehension. He is unlike us, contrary to our instincts. Someone has rightly said that it is texts like these that shows us that “the Christian life is a lifelong shedding of tepid thoughts of the goodness of God.”² And this is why God is to be praised, not only for his glorious and

gracious redeeming work for us but because this reveals to us who he is in his excellent greatness. And third, God is to be praised with everything.

God is to be praised with everything

In verses 3-5 we are told how to praise God or what to use in our praise of God. And the answer seems to be—everything. The psalmist writes, “Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing symbols.” Most commentators suggest that the psalmist isn’t listing these instruments because he is choosing them over others but because this was simply what they had. In other words, the psalmist isn’t holding back. He is thinking of every instrument, along with ourselves (e.g. dancing), and he is telling us to utilize them in praise to God.

The view of Scripture is not that some things should be employed in praise to God but all things. As we gather for corporate worship on Sundays, one of the reasons we utilize instruments and skilled people playing them is because we believe that they need to be employed in worship. I don’t know why certain instruments were invented in terms of what their maker had in mind, but the end goal of all of them is that they might be used to praise God.

This doesn’t mean, of course, that or praise of God cannot be solemn. Of course it can. But it is also fitting to make much of God with the playing of instruments, singing, and giving him shouts of praise. And finally we see who should praise God; he is to be praised by everyone.

God is to be praised by everyone

The psalmist concludes, “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!” (v. 6). This seems to be a fitting conclusion to the last psalm that preceded this five-psalm doxology. In Psalm 145:21, David had written, “My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and let all flesh bless his holy name forever and ever.” Now, five psalms later, the psalmist is calling again everything that has breath to praise the Lord. And indeed they will.

Now, I want to clarify. By that I don’t mean that all people without exception will be saved. The Bible clearly teaches otherwise. On the day of judgment those who have not believed will be told to depart from Christ, for he never knew them, and they will be thrown into the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). But on that day they of judgment they will have to admit that the Lord is the one true God and praise him as such. Every knee will bow—whether willingly or unwillingly—and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And it is this final note that reminds us of the need to declare the good news to others. One of the ways that we praise God is by telling others of what he has done for us in Jesus Christ and

² Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly* (Downers Grove, IL: Crossway, 2020), 172.

pleading with them to bow the knee to him in faith. In other words, we are telling others that our Lord deserves praise from them. They need to employ all that they have in praise to God, for that is what we were created to do. Piper is right. Missions exist because worship doesn't. So let us, in our pursuit of ensuring that more and more people praise our God, tell others of what Christ has done in living, dying, and rising and call on them to believe in him so that he may receive the glory due his name. And may we live a life of praise to our great God. May we praise him now as we come to the table. Amen.