

Creation praises God's glory (Praise Service)

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[0 : 00] So, perhaps you can turn back with me in your Bibles to Psalm 104 on page 607, as we are invited! to give glory to the God who enjoys His creation. This psalm and this evening, in a sense, are all about looking at God's world with wonder. Perhaps it might be helpful to think of a time in your past, or maybe just the last time, when there was something in the created world made you say, wow, stopped you in your tracks. For me, I can remember as a child, late at night, sneaking out of my bedroom window to lay on the grass, because I knew that there was a shower of shooting stars that evening, and spending hours watching, you know, the inky blackness of the sky as these blazing stars passed overhead. That was a wow moment for me. And it's good for us to have that sense of wonder in the world that God has made, and to acknowledge the God who made it.

I think for most Christians and most people in the world, we will never, ever suffer from a view of God that is too big, but we will often from time to time have a view of God that becomes too small. And so, I think Psalm 104 is one of these psalms that becomes a gift to us, because they can help to counter that, because in this psalm, two things we're going to focus on. We're going to meet the Lord God of glory, who we're told in verse 31, rejoices in His works. We're being invited to see the God who at Genesis 1 proclaimed the earth to be very good. And the psalm is going to show us why His world is very good, and why God rejoices in it. But we're also invited to recognize in verse 34 that we should rejoice in the Lord. So, we are to see the beauty of creation, but never to stop there.

Rather, we are to rejoice in the Lord. So, that's the two things we're going to think about. Why does the Lord rejoice in His works, and why should we rejoice in the God who loves and takes pleasure in His creation? Okay, verse 31, may the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in His works.

Again, if you think about maybe the last time you went to an art gallery, or you looked at a piece of architecture that was particularly impressive. If we spend any time at all reflecting, we are drawn in our hearts and in our minds to praise of various kinds. Perhaps it's the beauty that we see, the scale that's on display. Perhaps it's the scope and the scale. But at some point, we make that move from the masterpiece or the great piece of architecture to the one who made it. And that's the big idea of Psalm 104. The whole universe is a canvas revealing the masterpiece of God's design.

[3 : 20] We see wonder all around, and the Psalm really wants to bring that out for us, with the ultimate design that we wouldn't stop at the masterpiece. We would recognize the artist who made it all, and that we would give Him praise. When we rejoice in the wonderful works of God, we are following in the example of our God. And Psalm 104 gives us three reasons why the Lord chooses to rejoice in His works. And the first is because God's works reveal His glory. That's the connection of verse 31, may the glory of the Lord endure forever. May the Lord rejoice in His works. God's glory is seen in God's world, in this universe. And that's why the Psalm begins in poetic language, taking us back to

Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. Here is another way of picturing God as creator at the beginning. There is the idea of God as the King over His creation. Look at the way it's written, Lord my God, You're very great. You're clothed with splendor and majesty. This is the one who makes the clouds His chariot. And the universe that God creates is for us a revelation of His royal majesty.

So think about the way it's put together. Here is the Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is the King, and as the King, He is pictured as commissioning and commanding a great building project. Look at verse 2, He stretches out the heavens like a tent and lays the beams of His upper chambers on their waters. The idea of God intimately involved in creating this world. And as these verses develop, we see there is order, there is control, there are no rivals to the rule of God. God

sets limits.

It's there in verse 5, He set the earth on its foundations. It can never be moved. And then of the waters, by the time we get to verse 9, you set a boundary, the waters cannot cross. The idea that we find in Genesis 1 of dividing and separating the sea from the land, it's here in a different form. But God's powerful voice is what creates and shapes and fills this vast universe. So that God has charged the earth, the universe with His glory. Sadly, all too often we're too busy to notice it. It becomes commonplace to us. Sometimes we're too blinded to stop and to see and to worship, but that's what we're invited to.

We live in a city that should make it easy for us to worship, I think. Alexander McCall Smith, I love his quote. It used to be on the wall of Morningside Library. It's speaking about his home city, Edinburgh, here. He said, this is a city of shifting light, of changing skies, of sudden vistas, a city so beautiful it breaks the heart again and again and again. And if you've seen the sun shining on the crags, if you've been surprised by the beauty of Arthur's seat, then you know something of what he's talking about. We see glory everywhere in this world. We see glory in the starling murmurations. I don't know if you saw that one that was captured by the BBC. The starling murmuration above Chester. There was falcons coming to dive, but the falcons couldn't get anywhere because they were dancing in harmony.

[7 : 41] There's glory in the starlings. There's glory in the cheetah chasing its prey. There's glory in the roaring 40s around Cape Horn, where the currents at that point in our globe move at 4 billion cubic feet per second, where the winds regularly reach hurricane level over 200 miles an hour, where the waves can reach over 100 feet. There is glory in our world. And that's just in our world.

If we go galactic for a moment, think about our solar system. We are within the Milky Way galaxy. And if we, in our little solar system, were to fully orbit our galaxy, I am told it would take us 230 million years. That is vast. When we remember that our sun is just one of 200 billion or so stars in our galaxy. The Hubble telescope, when it was pointed at one fixed point in the sky for 12 days, detected 10,000 galaxies beyond our own. There is glory to God in our world. Two weeks ago, NASA confirmed 6,000 exoplanets, so planets outside our solar system. Before 1995, didn't know there was any. And now they're discovering thousands. So, our telescopes serve to enhance our vision of God's glory, but so too do our microscopes.

I learned about diatoms this week, the tiny microalgae in our waterways, invisible to the naked eye. But there are, you know, there are thousands of them in a single teaspoon. But they are amazingly beautiful. Each one is unique. And those tiny little things that we cannot even see, they generate somewhere between 20 to 50 percent of the world's oxygen. There's glory everywhere we look. And there's glory as we consider one another as God's image bearers. And one of the great privileges that we have as people is that we are uniquely able to reflect and to wonder. And we have been created with a sense of wonder that we might be drawn towards our wonderful God. We are unique. We do matter. We are tiny in the cosmos, but we are valuable to the God of glory. [10 : 29] So, that's one reason why the Lord rejoices in His works, because they reveal His glory. But there's a second one within the psalm. God rejoices in His works as they display His wisdom.

It's there in verse 24. How many are your works, Lord, in wisdom? You made them all. The earth is full of your creatures. So, as the psalm writer sits down to write this wonderful song, he has that instinctive understanding. When I look at a masterpiece in the universe, it demands a master craftsman, someone with wisdom to bring it all to be. And what he does is he turns to the seas and the oceans for that example. Verse 25, there is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number, living things both large and small. The ocean's an amazing place, isn't it? Well, we have the sunlight zone from the surface down to the depth about 200 meters. It only has about 3% of the world's water, but it hosts 90% of all marine species. And central to it all is the tiny zooplankton that seems to be so important to keeping the food chain going. But then you can go down into the real depth, into the midnight zone, 1,000 meters to 4,000 meters, where the only light that exists is the bioluminescence of the fish themselves. It's the home to the anglerfish and the ghost sharks, and all of these creatures that had been unknown for thousands of years, but each one of them giving glory to God in the wisdom of their design. And we're beginning to see them. The average depth of the ocean is beyond two miles. 80% of our seas are still unexplored, but when we do explore, they too will give glory to God's wisdom when new species and new ways of living are discovered. Back up to our surface. If you've ever had the joy of watching dolphins playing by the ferry on the way to Lewis, if you've ever seen a humpback whale breach the surface, if

you've ever snorkeled and watched a seahorse float by, then you have seen the wisdom of God before your very eyes. And the psalmist helps us to recognize that.

Here's the third reason why God the Lord rejoices in His works. It's because they reveal His authority. That's here really from verse 10 down to verse 30. The psalmist begins to look around and he begins to list each sphere of creation that puts on display the reality that God is King. So, verse 11 to 13, where's His eye? It's on the water systems, rather, verse 10. He makes springs, pour water into the ravines. It flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field.

The life that comes from the rain that supplies the land that supplies the living creatures, it comes from our God. And then He turns naturally from there, verse 14 to 16, to think about the produce of the land. He makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for people to cultivate.

Wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts. God provides for our needs. He provides for the animals, and He provides for people.

[14:19] giving thanks before a meal. That's never, you know, a kind of a mindless kind of thing that we perform by rote. It should be an opportunity for us into worship and into joy as we recognize God's provision, God's authority that means we can eat. And then He moves from there to think about the habitats. Verse 17, there the birds make their nests, the sork has its home in the junipers, the high mountains belong to the wild goats, the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.

I think that's the Salisbury Crags. He makes habitats suitable for different creatures. All the different biomes that we encounter in the world can all accommodate life. The snow leopard that has an easy time of it in King Craig normally lives in the high altitude, snowy mountains of Central Asia. I had the very restful, peaceful joy of just for a few moments watching a live cam of a South African watering hole. You ever want a breather from life? Find a live cam of a watering hole. And there was rhino, and there was a hippo, and there was some giraffes.

I'm guessing it was a highlights reel. There was an elephant, and I also discovered the heaviest flying bird in the world was there, the coribustard. You can watch them on a live cam.

And God the King establishes habitats for all of these creatures. Verse 19 to 23, it's the rhythms of day and night. He made the moon to mark the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. And when the sun goes down, the wild predators come out, and they are able to work, and they're able to find their food. But when the sun comes up, they go to bed, and then we get up and go to work the days before shift work. But this whole psalm is challenging the idea that creation is chaotic and random, that creation is some kind of cosmic accident. I read a paper trying to explain the beginning of the world in these terms. So, there was a garbage bag of living cells that was there at the beginning, and imagine that bag being shaken up. And from the shake-up, we have the world. It requires a lot more faith than to trust in the authority of a divine, wise, glorious, authoritative God who spoke and brought it into existence. And then as you continue to look at that section, we are reminded in verse 27 to 30, this God who has created all things, this God who provides for all things, He is the God who is sovereign over life and over death. When you hide your face, they are terrified. When you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your spirit, they are created, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. Our royal creator King was there at the beginning, creating it all, and He continues to sustain it all. And in Jesus, our Lord has entered in to this world He has made in order to bring redemption.

[18:07] Why does the Lord rejoice in His works? Because creation in all of its glory returns praise to the God who made it. It's interesting, that's the way Psalm 103 closes, and then we get into 104. Psalm 103, verse 22, praise the Lord, all His works everywhere in His dominion. Dominion, rule, kingdom, authority, everything under God's rule should praise the Lord. It's there towards the end of the Psalms as well, Psalm 148. Just to pick out, having praised the sun, the moon, and the stars, verse 5, let them praise the name of the Lord, for at His command they were created. The King creates, therefore the King deserves worship. And as these Psalms present that instinct, that creation praises its Creator, perhaps we begin to recognize something of the tragedy within humanity.

Because of sin, we no longer instinctively praise our Creator. It's like the magnetic poles have been turned around, so instead of being drawn towards God in worship, now we move away from Him and we tend to ignore Him. Since Genesis 3, that's been the natural pattern of the human race, taking glory from God and taking it for ourselves. Or as Paul wrote in Romans 1, worshiping created things rather than our Creator. But still we have the reality of our loving Creator God, who has filled

the universe with wonderful things, who has been and continues to display His glory and wisdom and power, and He is continuing to call us towards a loving relationship of worship and wonder. So our second question is this, why should we rejoice in the Lord of creation? Why should we follow the Psalmist? In verse 34, he said, may my meditation be pleasing to Him as I rejoice in, not in creation, as I rejoice in the Lord. I came across a little phrase that I really appreciate. Paul Tripp, biblical counselor and Bible teacher, he recently wrote this as a piece of advice, don't pick a flower, boil an egg, or pet a dog without worshiping a glorious God.

What's he saying there? I think he's saying the same thing as Psalm 104. Whenever we discover something that is good within God's creation, whenever we encounter something that creates a sense of awe in the universe, now whether that's a sunrise or the crashing waves, whether it's birdsong or autumn leaves or boiling an egg, we are invited to move from enjoying the good thing to rejoicing in God, our good creator. For many of us, I imagine we have at some point enjoyed David Attenborough and his documentaries. And to watch a David Attenborough documentary, you recognize that there is something coming close to worship happening there. David Attenborough said this, it seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement, the greatest source of visual beauty, the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living. So close. What's missing is that he stops at the natural world.

When we watch one of David Attenborough's wonderful documentaries or any other nature program, we should press beyond the natural world to the God who created that world, to the God who is the source of greatest excitement and visual beauty and intellectual interest. And that's what Psalm 104 does for us. It reminds us that God has been incredibly kind to us in telescoping his glory for us, in helping to rescue us from the tendency to shrink God down or to ignore him in his world.

[23 : 12] And this matters for each one of us personally, when we understand that we are made by God for glory. Why do we love glorious things? Because we were made for glory and that ultimately our hearts would be captured by his perfect, unsurpassed glory. But the Bible tells us, and so does our experience, that sin, which curves us in on ourselves, will make us glory robbers.

In that sense, rather than recognizing God as King, we want to push him out. We want to take credit for things that only God can do and produce. We long for people to see our glory rather than his. And so, from the very earliest time of Adam and Eve taking the forbidden fruit, we have been stealing glory from our God. But we're also invited to discover in the Bible, and we discover it personally in Jesus, that only God's glory can truly satisfy. That's the good news of the gospel. There is an answer for our hungry hearts that are looking for glory, and it's found in the Lord Jesus. He is the one who, John 1 tells us, created the world in wisdom. And then he stepped into this world that he made. He stepped into the canvas of creation, revealing to us the perfect glory of God in his perfect life of true obedience, in his loving sacrificial death for our glory robbing, and in his resurrection.

With the result, that we can live with hope. We can live with hope that there is a day coming when we will gladly give God glory. Always. There is joy coming. That we will live in the light of his glory. Always. Always. As we come to trust in Jesus, the glorious Savior. We're in holiday season, and maybe some of us are going away on holiday. Maybe it's just that we're spending time in the city with family and friends, and the weather is nice. Can we talk to one another and talk to our own hearts and souls about the glory of God that is behind the beautiful colors and the delicious meal and the incredible view? Can we invite ourselves and others into wonder?

Can we ask God to create something of that childlike wonder in ourselves and in others, that we would slow down to smell the roses, to pet the dog, to boil the egg, all the while seeing through to the God of greater glory? Can we live with that sense of everyday worship as we walk through God's world to really say, thank you for that delicious meal? To sing through life as we are struck again and again by God's great glory. I will sing to the Lord all my life. I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him as I rejoice in the Lord.