

PM Psalm 148 "Praise the Lord!"

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[0 : 00] Psalm 148, Psalm 148, and we'll read the whole of this psalm. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the heights. Praise Him, all His angels. Praise Him, all His hosts.

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

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created, and He established them forever and ever. He gave a decree, and it shall not pass away. Praise the Lord from the earth.

You great sea creatures and all deeps. Fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling His word. Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars. Beasts and all livestock, keeping things and flying birds. Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth. Young men and maidens together, old men and children.

[1 : 27] Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted. His majesty is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for His name. He has raised up a horn for His people. Praise for all His saints, for the people of Israel who are near to Him.

Praise the Lord. May God bless to us this reading and part of this story of creation. Genesis chapter 1, verses 1 to 19.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light. And there was light.

And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness He called night.

[2 : 40] And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day. And God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters.

And let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the expanse, and separated the waters that were under the expanse, from the waters that were above the expanse.

And it was so. And God called the expanse heaven. And there was evening, and there was morning, the second day. And God said, let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place.

And let the dry land appear. And it was so. God called the dry land earth. And the waters that were gathered together, He called seas.

And God saw that it was good. And God said, let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit, in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.

[3 : 53] And God said, let the earth grow. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.

And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens, to give light upon the earth. And it was so.

And God made the two great lights, the greater light, to rule the day, and the lesser light, to rule the night.

And the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens, to give light on the earth. To rule over the day, and over the night.

And to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the fourth day.

[5 : 11] Just to there, may God bless to us this reading also. I want us to look at Psalm 148. And we'll go through this psalm, looking at it bit by bit.

Praise the Lord. That's the opening words of it. And that's the refrain that is repeated 12 times in the course of this short psalm.

And that obviously is the theme of the psalm. Praise the Lord. And at first sight, it may seem that the exhortations given to praise the Lord are somewhat random.

A kind of haphazard collection of beings and things that have to praise God. But in fact, this is quite a well worked out and orderly piece of writing.

Poetic writing, but nonetheless orderly. It falls into two parts. Praise the Lord from the heavens. That's what verses 1b through to 6 teach us.

[6 : 15] And then from verse 7 onwards, praise the Lord from the earth. So you see, there are two parts to this. Praising God from the heavens. Praising God from the earth.

And each of these two parts follow a similar pattern. That the psalmist mentions who are to praise God. Or what things are to praise God.

And he works through things that are in the heavens in a more or less orderly fashion. And then he gives reasons why they should praise God. And then he mentions things on the earth.

And works through them in a more or less orderly fashion. And then gives a supreme reason why they should sing praise to God. And altogether, we've got a very all-embracing and reasoned account of praising God.

Everybody, everything is included in this. And good reasons are given for it. And that's a summary of what we're going to look at.

[7 : 16] And you can see that this obviously has practical significance for us. It is obviously intended to stir up an attitude of praise to God.

To show what he's like. And to show why we should praise him. And although other entities and beings are brought into account here.

We cannot doubt that the whole purpose of the psalmist was that from this we should learn how to praise God better. And that therefore is the practical outworking a hope of our sermon on this text, on this passage this evening.

So let's go through this bit by bit as I say. And we'll begin with praise from the heavens. And as I mentioned, he begins by enumerating who have to praise God or what things are to praise God. And then he gives a reason or reasons why. So who are to praise God from the heavens? Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise him in the heights. And then he begins with angels.

[8 : 23] He works from the top down we might say. And he begins with the angels. All his angels. All his hosts. So we're looking at angels conceived of as well-ordered body of beings.

In battle order we might even say. The word hosts implies that. There's many of them. That's one aspect of the idea of a host.

But I think that a battle order is very much in mind here as well. So he's thinking of angels as doing God's will. They're all there in his presence.

And they're all on alert. Ready to do the business that is allotted to them. And there are many of them doing his bidding. And these are told to praise God.

And then we come down from the highest heavens. We might say to the universe as we know it around us. And we've got the sun and the moon and the shining stars.

[9 : 33] These heavenly bodies are exalted to praise God as well. The prominent features of the night sky and of the day sky as well. In regard to the sun. These bodies that we can see and that influence our conduct.

But because of the role, the function that they perform. These two are invited to sing praise to God. And then coming down further.

We've got in verse 4. Praise him you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens. And that I take to mean simply the clouds. The waters of this world are separated from the waters above this world.

By the atmosphere, by the expanse that we read about in Genesis 1. And that's the way that they're looking at this. There is water in this world. There's water above this world.

Namely in the clouds. So that is I think the way that he's thinking about things. Everything in the heavenly realm.

[10:40] Talking about heavenly realm widely, broadly. These have to sing praise to God or give praise to God. The angels, the heavenly bodies and the clouds themselves.

Right, that's the exhortation given to these folks. And you can see that it doesn't include everything perhaps. But the intention is that this is an all-embracing command to beings and entities.

That are out with this world in the broadly speaking heavenly realm. Now, why have they got to praise him? And that's the important question given here.

Because this isn't just an empty exhortation. It's an exhortation that's given with good ground. So what are the grounds for them engaging in praise to God?

Well, verses 5 and 6 tell us this. And we've got three aspects of things here, I think, in particular. Let them praise the name of the Lord for, there's the reason you see, for he commanded and they were created.

[11:49] They have to praise God as creator. And we have to think here of the power of the creator. How did he do it?

Through a lot of hard work and effort. Through years and years of patient working and striving. No, he commanded and he came into being.

He just spoke the word and it was done. Let there be light, he said, and there was light. The heavens by the word of God did their beginning take. And by the breathing of his mouth, he all their hosts did make, as Psalm 33 tells us.

So it's the remarkable power that he just needed to say something and it happened. That's the way, the aspect of creation that has particularly brought to our attention.

The power of the creator, that's what is in mind here. And the first reason for giving praise to God. Closely connected with that are the other two things that we've got here.

[12:54] He established them. And some translations put that slightly differently. He set them in their place. I think that's important.

The creation that he made was not a haphazard agglomeration of different objects called into being by his power.

They were set in order. They were placed in a way that made sense and that formed some sort of useful pattern.

It's not like you might see in a quarry where quarry men have been working, if they work in quarries nowadays, shaping stones and chiseling them out until they're perfectly square or perfectly made in accordance with the pattern that is necessary for a building.

It's not a quarry with all the stones there beautifully made. It's a building that he has made, as it were, where all these beautiful stones that the craftsman has called into being are brought together in a meaningful pattern so that they all fit together nicely.

[14:08] And what we see are not a quantity of individual stones, but a unity, a building where all the bits fit together in perfect harmony.

That's the sort of creation that God has made. Not something, as I say, that is haphazard and simply the calling into being of certain things, but the setting of them in a regular pattern, the order of the creation.

That's what's in mind here. And if you look at the story of Genesis 1, I'm not going to go into this, but if you do look carefully in the story of Genesis 1, I think you can quite plainly see that there was a significant idea of order being created there.

The way that he went about it, beginning with light and darkness, then the sky and the sea, and then the dry land. And then he goes over these three areas again and creates the sun, moon, and stars, and the creatures of the sky and the sea, and then the vegetation, the animals of the dry land.

That's not quite it. I made a wee slip there, but you can see the idea there that there was a pattern, there was an order in the creation. And that's what's in mind here as well. We praise God for the might of his creation, for the power involved in him speaking and things coming into being as a result.

[15:33] And we have to praise God because he did this in an orderly fashion and produced a world where everything fitted together in a good and wholesome pattern at the beginning.

And then there is this idea of preservation. Now again, there are different translations to this, but he established them forever and ever.

And there you've got the idea of continuity. He didn't create this so that it would function for a few years and then fizzle out and come to nothing. He created this so that it would be established

forever and ever.

Not that this world isn't going to come to an end, but when it does, there's going to be a new heavens and a new earth. But relatively speaking, from the human perspective, the hills are eternal. They were created forever and ever. And I think poetic license allows us to say that this is eternal, although in the whole perspective of scripture, we know that there's a sort of modification of that to be made.

[16 : 39] He gave a decree about this and it shall not pass away. So this may mean that he gave a decree involving the preservation of the world.

At any rate, you've got this idea, not just of a world that was brought into being, that was going to be temporary, but a world that was not only ordered, but that was to be permanent.

And you see this coming out in the story of creation, part of which we read. What sort of trees were to be created? What sort of plants were to be created?

Trees that had seed in them. And that, of course, speaks of preservation. It speaks of one generation after another of plants.

They weren't created in such a way that they lived and they died. They were created in such a way that they lived and reproduced and died. And their progenies, we might call it, continued to flourish.

[17 : 41] So even in the way that things were created there, there is this idea that creation was meant to be permanent. God provided for its preservation.

And then if you think about what was said to the birds and the fish and the animals and human beings as well, be fruitful and multiply and increase in the earth and fill it.

That was the general command that was given. Here was a decree, we might say, that he issued that provided for the preservation of life in this world.

It was going to reproduce itself so that it would go on and on and on. And the earth was to be filled, indicating that there was to be something permanent there in the way of life that God made.

So again, it wasn't a life that was made to flourish and die. It was a life that was made to flourish, reproduce, and eventually, of course, in the light of the later story, to die as well.

[18 : 44] And that idea of preservation is written into the scheme of creation as we have it in Genesis 1. It may be, however, that he's got something else in mind here, namely what happened after the flood.

When God said, summer and winter, cold and heat, and seed time and harvest will not fail. And that was the decree that God issued then.

The earth would continue to revolve on its axis, tilted in such a way that there would be summer and winter, day and night. This involved the orderly arrangement of the heavenly bodies to preserve summer and winter, cold and heat, and therefore seed time and harvest.

And there you see, it's the preservation of the world and the creatures in it. And that was God's decree after the flood. And that may be in mind, in part, he gave a decree implying the preservation of the world.

So these are pretty important ideas, it seems to me. Why have these creatures, these entities, to praise God? Because he's the powerful creator, he's the one that has ordered this creation, and he's provided for the preservation of this creation.

[20 : 02] And that's the teaching of this part of the passage. Now, we have to ask, of course, a few practical questions about this. And the one that I think is most obvious is, what does he mean when he tells the sun, moon, and stars to praise God?

After all, the angels, well, we can see them praising God. We know that they worship God. In his presence, they veil their faces, because they recognize that they are nothing in comparison with the majesty of God.

And we do know that, according to the scriptures, the angels are beings with a will and qualities that enable them to praise God from what we might call the heart.

You know, they're not inanimate, they've got the life in them and capable of an act of the will that bends their will before God.

And we're, to use a picture, of course, they bow their knee, not that angels have knees, but you know what I mean, they bow their knee, figuratively speaking, before God, because they are angelic beings worshipping him and therefore praising him.

[21 : 18] Now, that's straightforward. No problem about that. But as I say, what does it mean to say that the sun, moon, and stars praise God or the clouds and the heavens praise God? It isn't

perhaps so obvious.

Well, we must remember, of course, first of all, that this is poetry. So, poetry uses images and you don't dissect images. You ask, what impression is this meant to create?

And I think we've just got to say, the best I can do anyway, that the sun, moon, and stars praise God by doing what he ordered them to do.

When they fulfil the function for which God placed them, they are thereby obeying his will and they are bringing glory to God. They are thereby praising God.

And that's the best that I can make of this. When we appreciate the sun and it brings warmth to us and we feel the warmth and our backs working outside or whatever and when we see the plants in our garden and the things in the fields growing, that is the sun fulfilling the commission that God had appointed it for.

[22 : 27] That is the sun in its place performing the function for which it was created and it's praising God by obedience to his will.

That's the sort of idea we must have. And then again the clouds. Now, not for us usually, but in some climates, the people are so glad of the clouds because they bring shade from the burning sun.

The clouds bring rain. And again, we can be in situations we're so glad of the rain that we don't have to water the garden and so on.

We're glad of the rain that makes the crops grow and so on. Okay, so the clouds, when they perform their function, are obeying God's will and by that obedience, they are showing forth his glory and in that sense, they are giving praise to God.

So that's what it seems to me this is meaning. This is the sort of thing they have in mind it has in mind when it speaks of these inanimate things giving praise to God. Now, another thing that I think about this, if these creatures have got to praise God because he's the creator and the one that has organized the world and the one that preserves the world, if they have got to praise God for that, surely we should not withdraw our praise from God as if it didn't refer to us.

[24 : 02] Now, we are not specifically commanded to do this but it seems to me why is he telling us all this unless to make us safe from the heart?

If the sun, moon and stars are praising God because he's the creator, the organizer and the preserver of the world, then why should we be silent? And I think that's something relevant.

We see nature programs. Some people, more than others, study nature, understand how things work and all of us see the beauty of a sunset and so on unless we're very blind.

In other words, these things are obvious to us to see if we look at things from the right perspective.

We can still see the wonder of God, the creator, in the world today despite the disorder that has come into this world because God cursed the world for human sin.

Despite that, we can see him still as the organizer of things and we do recognize that he has made things in such a way as to preserve things in due order.

[25 : 14] So, God is the creator, organizer and preserver of the world is visible to us still in the creation that he has made. The heavens God's glory do declare.

The skies his handworks preach and so on. We know that, Samuel. We know that idea and some people know it better than others but surely, surely we should join with the sun, moon and stars and the clouds and the angels too in praising God because he's the creator, organizer and sustainer, preserver of the world that he has made.

Now, there is a difficulty here, of course, we're asked to look at nature and worship God as a result and the difficulty at a practical level it seems to me in our setup at least is partly this that some people have gone overboard about this and this is all that they can see in God when they worship the creator and sometimes it goes to such an extent actually that they're not worshipping the creator at all they're worshipping the creation and it's not unnatural that there has been a certain rebellion against that point of view because people have gone overboard in that direction we tend to say that that's subpar it's not really a big thing for Christians but I would like to suggest that we've got to have a balanced perspective about this as long as we remember the second part of the psalm which we're going to look at in a moment we can indeed join with the rest of creation in praising God as the creator the organiser and the preserver of the world here's a quotation it's from the Westminster

Confession of Faith which is meant to express sound Presbyterian doctrine the light of nature that is the revelation that comes from God through nature the light of nature shows that there is a God no problem who has lordship and sovereignty over all is good and does good to all and is therefore to be feared loved praised called upon trusted in and served with all the heart and with all the soul and with all the might and that to my mind is a very very strong statement of what we call natural revelation the revelation that comes to us in nature and this part of the confession I know there's another part of the confession that seems to be saying something quite significantly different but this part of the confession of faith says that God is revealed in creation as someone who is to be feared loved praised called upon and trusted in and served from the heart and that's a pretty strong statement so let's not play it down unnecessarily let's not go to the extremes that some people do whereby as I say they worship the creation rather than the creator but let's keep it in balance this is something useful to us if we use it wisely but more important is the second part of the psalm and that begins at verse 7 praise the lord from the earth and he does the same thing here he goes through various entities and invites them to praise God and then he tells why a different reason this time so you might think again there's a haphazard connection the collection of things here but there's a certain pattern in this as well there's the sea the air and the land and I think if you see that we recognise that there is a pattern in this so he begins with the sea praise the lord from the earth you great sea creatures and all deeps well the great sea creatures are big creatures like the whales and so on and you know if you look at them from a human perspective you see what fantastic creatures these are here's a whale that can jump out of the water although it weighs tons and tons it's quite fantastic to see that and these are wonderful creatures but they're invited to sing praise to God the deeps are perhaps just the ocean deeps so there's the sea and then he turns to the air to the atmosphere and he talks about things there and perhaps he thinks about the more unusual ones and more impressive features he begins with fire and that may well actually be lightning that is being thought of here and that's quite a startling thing if you don't understand it scientifically and even if you do understand it scientifically if you see a tropical storm with flash after flash of lightning it is a fantastic thing even though you can explain it from a meteorological point of view so there's something quite outstanding to them the fire of lightning and then there's the hail which they didn't perhaps get too often but was pretty dramatic when it came and then there's the snow which once again they didn't get very often not as much as we would normally get in our latitudes and again there's the meteorological set up there and the mist so the things in the air stormy wind again fulfilling his word all these things are in his hand he made them he appointed them for a purpose and there they are giving snow giving lightning giving mist giving hail and they're fulfilling his word the sort of thing we've already looked at but all these things refer to things in this world that we see around us in the atmosphere and then of course he comes to the land the earth after dealing with the sea and air we've got the land and he begins with the land itself mountains and all hills and then again you see the more outstanding things he's talking about there the more impressive mountains with their height and so on and then he comes to the things that grow in the earth fruit trees and all cedars so the fruit trees are mentioned for their productivity the cedars are mentioned probably because of their strength and beauty because that's the way that the cedar tree was often thought about in the Old Testament scriptures so he's taking these examples of what grows in the world and he's saying these two are those impressive to us and useful they've to give praise to God and then there's the creatures beasts and all livestock that is wild beasts wild animals and domesticated animals creeping things and flying birds insects and birds different types of created things and then it comes to human beings and all classes and sorts of human beings are commanded to praise God so we have the kings and the princes and all rulers of the earth and so the high and mighty have to sing praise to God and with all peoples no nation is excluded and then we've got the different types of people by gender age group by gender and age group we've got that here so we have young men and old men and children we've got men and maidens together so there's no exception there and that's the way that he deals with the things of this world creatures in the sea creatures created things in the air creatures in this world including human beings were all invited to sing praise to God all embracing all inclusive once again now why have they to do this and in this case there's a different reason given let them praise the name of the Lord for his name alone is exalted there's no God like this God his majesty is above heaven and earth he's so great that it cannot be comprehended in this world what makes it so great here's the crux of the matter here's the chief point of it all he has raised up a horn for his people praise for all his saints for the people of Israel who are near to him he has raised up a horn for his people now this of course is

poetry as I say but I think we understand what a horn could be a horned animal is an animal with power a powerful creature a fearful creature that's the way it's used in the Old Testament as a symbol often enough and it's not unnatural therefore that this refers to a king and that's what's in mind here he's raised up a king for his people so who is he speaking about and obviously he's speaking about the king that came from David's line and who is the king that came from [34 : 33] David's line the Lord Jesus himself of the seed of David he is the horn that was raised up for his people we shouldn't think this is a strange way of speaking about things for Psalm 89 says this my faithful love will be with him David and through mine or through David's son and through my name his horn will be exalted or Psalm 132 which we looked at we sang here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one so he is an anointed king that is going to serve as a horn coming out from David's line or in Ezekiel 29 on that day I will make a horn grow for the house of Israel so there are these prophecies of the Old Testament that spoke about a horn coming a great king that was going to come and that we know is the Messiah the praise of all God's people and that's the reason why the creatures in this world the entities in this world mentioned and all the people in this world that's the reason why they have to sing praise to God

God has raised up this horn and that raised up may simply mean brought him to prominence God might raise up a ruler meaning put him in a place of authority or it might mean more than that it might mean that he exalted him and that obviously is also true about Jesus he was raised up in the sense that he was provided for us as a king but he was also raised up in the sense that he was exalted he was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God in the place of honour and authority appointed to be a prince of the saviour exalted exalted and that's what has happened and that's the reason why we have to sing praise to God now there's a couple of ideas that we have to ask about in regard to this ok I don't think we have too much doubt that if we're thinking about creation it's not unnatural that all in society that all created things should be invited to praise him but here you see animals and plants and the climatic conditions are invited to praise

God because God has raised up a horn for his people and that makes you ask what part do these things have in the purpose of God and salvation which is what's being talked about here God has provided the Messiah who gave himself for his people and was raised to glory why should created entities and animals and the climatic conditions themselves give praise to God because a saviour has been provided as God had promised and that I think is a question worth reflecting on and I think I've got two answers quite briefly for that one answer is this because they too are going to be redeemed from the disorderliness that has come into this world because of sin Jesus is going to redeem this world this world is under a curse it's now disordered it's going from bad to worse the process of degeneration is there in the natural world but one day it's going to be released from that bondage to decay and on what basis is it going to be released from that bondage to decay because of the saviour

Jesus has died on the cross for his people yes but he's dealt with sin so thoroughly that the degeneration that's characteristic of this world is going to be destroyed and there's going to be a new heavens and a new earth which is a home of righteousness and in that way this created world is going to be involved in the great redemption the whole world is groaning as in the pains of childbirth waiting for the redemption to come and no wonder they should praise God because he sent a saviour into this world a king to rule his people because they are going to participate in the fruits of that great work that he performed that's one reason the other is that these things that we've mentioned are employed by God for the furtherance of his purpose of grace all things are in his hand and everything is working for the good of those that love God and that means the weather is working for the furtherance of God's glory and they're working in accordance with the pattern that God wishes for the well-being of his people all things are now ours working for our well-being the birds and the beasts all the animals the climatic conditions everything is in the hand of God and it's all subservient to the well-being of God's people and no wonder they should praise God because they are employed in this great task of salvation I should know some historical examples but I don't remember any offhand but there are occasions where we might say that as nature fought on behalf of the Israelites on some occasions in the Old Testament so nature is at work bringing a person to faith God works through the natural world to bring people to faith the natural world is an instrument in God's hand for the accomplishment of redemption and for that reason too therefore they should sing praise to God because he sent a horn of salvation to his people another thing we might think of is that it very much says that this is for the people of Israel

who are near to him but of course it doesn't limit itself to that it doesn't say only the people of [40 : 44] Israel should praise God for this it says that all nations should and the reason for that is quite obvious that when Jesus came it was to widen out the purpose of God so that he wasn't especially mainly the God of Israel but he was the God of all nations go and make disciples of all nations is now the theme of the New Testament mandate and that explains why although he was sent for the house of Israel as a horn that grew out of the line of David he was for all peoples and all peoples are invited to praise him so what does this mean for us it means we have to praise God for his salvation we have to trust in him we have to put our confidence in him and we have to honour him because of the great gift that he has given in sending a Messiah amongst us but what does that praise involve it isn't just coming together in church and singing praise it isn't even going around our task day by day singing a psalm or a hymn to ourselves praise in regard to the sun moon and stars it meant obedience to his will praise was expressed through obedience and through the fulfilment of the function that had been committed to these heavenly bodies and that's the way we should think of praise as well it isn't just that we meet together and sing some nice complimentary songs about God it's that we render obedience to him day by day it's that we take up wholeheartedly the position that God has set us in and that we're fulfilling the role that he's given to us in our particular setting in life and in the particular age that we are in life and so on and in that way we're giving praise to God it isn't just as I say a matter of worship it's a matter of daily obedience and that's what we're invited to do yes by all means look at nature and say what a great God there is there creating the world organising the world preserving the world and let us worship and praise him for that but let us especially say we have the horn of salvation the Messiah himself has come and for that we praise God by our lips and our hearts in worship and by our activities in obedience from day to day may God bless to us his word
Grünen he Mitt the glory to and the inn of the who helps his name to be frustrated