

Everything that Breathes, Praise the Lord

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[0 : 00] St. John's Shaughnessy Church I think I've figured out why the book of Psalms is the biggest book in the Bible.

I think it's because there's more to praising God than we can imagine and we're so slow at learning how to praise. And these last two Psalms are like bookends for Psalms 1 and 2 and you remember the pattern at the end of each of the first four books of the Psalms they end with a call to praise. Now at the end of the book of Psalms we have this magnificent call and command to praise. And there's a difference. The first four endings of the books are pale and bloodless next to these last two Psalms.

They are a sustained fortissimo. They are a noisy, clashing, exuberant shout of praise to God. They are not very Anglican and they're not very well behaved. And they show us that it's a very difficult thing to praise God with your lips closed tight and your fists closed tight and your heart closed even tighter.

[1 : 45] And I think these last two Psalms in the book are the very opposite and antidote to a grumpy, self-absorbed church attendance which afflicts other churches but never St. John's.

And it shows us that heaven is full of music and joy and that we might as well begin to get used to it now. So they stand at the end of the book and they echo for us Psalms 1 and 2 as well.

Do you remember back that far? Psalm 1 opened to us the life of blessing and obedience to God's word and Psalm 2 announced that God had set his king, his son, on his throne.

And from Psalm 3 up to 5 Psalms ago, we have moved into the messy reality of life in all its brutality and difficulty, in searing loneliness and in chronic pain and through the experience of the absence of God.

And if you like, those first Psalms brought us orientation to God and the life of God and we've been moving through disorientation reorientation which is where we live and now as we move back into the last few Psalms, we move into reorientation.

[3 : 02] And I know that some of you have found the most distressing Psalms to be the most precious. And it's not at the end of the book of Psalms that we're encouraged to shut our eyes to the reality of evil.

In fact, Psalm 149 talks about evil. But rather it is because this is the direction we're heading and this is our hope because the God in whom we have placed our trust, his power is unstoppable and his love is unquenchable and his glory is indestructible and his purposes are unshakable.

And because of who he is, the Psalms call us to apply ourselves to praise. And this is what that says. It says that the Christian life, the end of the Christian life is not obedience.

It's adoration. And you just can't apply yourself half-heartedly to this. We're meant to take the best of our powers and devote them to the worship of God, not because God is vain and insecure, but for our own good.

There are only two ways to wean ourselves from the attachments and the addictions and the pleasures which strangle the work of God in us. One is a negative way and that is to heed the warnings of Scripture against these things and to deny ourselves and take up our cross, which is important.

[4 : 26] But the second is the positive way, where we replace the lesser distractions and diversions with something substantial and eternal, which is the praise of God.

That is why we have to exercise ourselves constantly in the praise of God, lest we develop a taste for things that would draw us away from heaven.

Now, if you just let me say this, Psalm 150 is right brain and will stimulate the artistic side of your personality.

And Psalm 149 is left brain and it's logical and rational. I'll show you what that means in just a minute. And Psalm 149 is written to believers. You see, you see, you see, in verse 1, 5 and 9, we are called His faithful.

It's a special word and it reflects God's love. Sometimes it's translated saints. By the way, you know that there's no such thing as a spiritual elite, that saints are not made by a committee of cardinals, that all God's people are His saints.

[5 : 36] That's what it means to belong to Him. And Psalm 149 gives us three pictures of the salvation that God gives His saints. And the first picture is in verses 1 to 4 and I've called it the delight of salvation.

And I know you want to read it, but I'm going to read it to you. Praise the Lord. Sing to the Lord a new song, His praise in the assembly of the faithful. Let Israel be glad in their maker.

Let the sons or offspring of Zion rejoice in their king. Let them praise His name with dancing, making melody to Him with timbrel, which is a kind of tambourine, and lyre.

Why? For the Lord takes pleasure in His people. He adorns the humble with victory or salvation. I don't know if you've ever thought about the fact that God takes delight in us.

Be aware that God takes pleasure in each one of His people. But in the midst of the difficulty and suffering of the circumstances of our life and that underneath all the purposes that God is bringing about is the delight of God in each of us.

[6 : 43] And that's why this psalm begins with its bracing command to sing a new song to the Lord. It's a new song because the God who made us from dust and created us in the beginning is bringing us into a new creation and is remaking us for His kingdom.

That's why we sing the new song in verse 1 in the assembly of God's people because being gathered and being assembled is part of being saved.

The biblical picture of salvation is not me by myself worshipping God in heaven. It is of a community who has been gathered together.

That's why we meet week by week by week. The purpose of our gathering is a part rehearsal for heaven. Difficult as that is to believe. And what gathers us and unites us in verse 2 is that well we have decided to be ruled by God's king.

The very way in which God is remaking us is as we surrender to the king of Zion. The very newness of our new song comes from the blessing of His rule to us.

[7 : 59] Which is why Jesus said when He was here if anyone thirsts let him come to me and drink and out of their hearts will flow rivers of living water. I mean it's enough to make you want to get up and dance, isn't it?

Or at least take up a tambourine and bang it once or twice. Or play a few chords on the lyre. That's why I think verse 4 comes with such force He takes delight in us.

He beautifies the humble with salvation. So that's the delight of salvation. The second picture of salvation is in verse 5. Let's read this one together. Let the faithful exult in glory.

Let them sing for joy on their couches. Do you not think that is an odd picture? And my wife got tremendous humour this week out of imagining all the St. John's members lying on their couches singing for joy.

Well, it's a deeply personal picture of salvation because the couch or the bed in Psalm 6 was the place where we poured out our hearts to God with many tears and fears.

[9 : 11] And I'm not sure whether it is the joy of salvation in verse 5 that makes me sleep or whether it makes me too joyful to sleep.

I'm not sure. I've never actually had the experience of being too joyful and singing on my couch. And it's probably better to leave this picture alone.

But it's obviously a portrait of security and the security that salvation brings to it. And then finally, the third picture in 149 is the spread of salvation.

We need to read these words, particularly verse 6. We'll read 6 to 9, but I want you to notice verse 6. Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands to wreak vengeance on the nations, chastisement on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains, the nobles with fetters of iron, and to execute on them the judgment written, this is glory for all his faithful ones, praise the Lord.

I wonder if you would have written the end of the psalm like that. This passage has been famously misused to justify violence in the name of God. It was used by a character called Sclopius in the

17th century to incite the princes of Europe to the 30 years religious war.

[10 : 32] This is the passage he used. And about a century before it, it was used by Thomas Munster. To incite the peasants to revolt. And in the ensuing battle, 100,000 peasants were killed.

But there are three things, of course, that tell us we cannot read it this way. The first is that it is God alone who brings judgment. It is God who inflicts any kind of vengeance.

Or more accurately, it is God who brings judgment through his Messiah when he will come with his holy angels, inflicting judgment on those who hate him. But secondly, and perhaps even more importantly, if you look at verse 6, the second line explains the first line.

In other words, we take the two-edged sword as we proclaim the praise of God. It's a metaphor. We bring judgment to others through our praise of God.

The only exercise of power for the people of God is in their worship of God. It's exactly the same in the last verse of the last Psalm, 148. You see, he has raised up a horn for his people.

[11 : 43] That is the picture of military strength. How? Praise from all his people. That's why we execute judgment that is written.

Because when we speak the praise of God, we proclaim the word of God. And the third reason I don't think this can be justified in that way is because the New Testament is absolutely clear. It says to us we don't contend against flesh and blood. We contend against principalities and powers and spiritual hosts of wickedness. The Apostle Paul says to us in 2 Corinthians that though we live in the world, we don't conduct a worldly war.

That the weapons of our warfare are not worldly. He's talking about praise and about speaking the faith. I mean, they have divine power to destroy strongholds.

He says, we destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God. We take every thought captive to Christ. What the psalm is telling us is that it is through praise that God spreads his kingdom.

[12 : 49] Because as the praise of God spreads, salvation goes with it and judgment. Because judgment and salvation are the two sides of the one coin. Because some people respond and receive what God has to offer and others reject.

And it's a powerful reminder to us that praise is not an exercise of spiritual escapism. We don't praise God to give us a spiritual high and close our eyes to the reality of the world.

See, evil is real. But the primary evil in our world is the rejection of the Son of God and turning away from the purposes of God. And the praise of God confronts the reality of this life with the two-edged sword of God's word.

I don't know if you've ever read through the New Testament, God uses a number of methods for curbing evil, for restraining evil. And amongst them is the spoken praises of his people.

And as we speak the praise of God, we frustrate evil and we become part of God's purposes both for salvation and for judgment. This is glory for all his faithful ones.

[14 : 02] Well, I leave it with you to think about further. Let's turn over to Psalm 150, shall we? Now, here is the flower, if you will, of praise.

Let everything that has breath at the end, everything that has breath, praise the Lord. Thirteen times we are to praise. Three times we are to praise God, Yahweh.

And ten times we are told where, how and why. Verse one. Praise the Lord, praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty firmament.

The mighty firmament is the other side of heaven turned away from earth. In other words, the psalm is calling on the angels to mingle their praise with ours so that we can sing the music of the spheres, so that this creation will make the kind of harmony which it began for.

Does God deserve any less? No. Verse two. Praise him for his mighty deeds, praise him according to his excellent greatness. Biblical praise isn't just emotionalism and empty sentiment.

[15 : 10] It's not like when you go to the hockey game and the organ plays to stimulate the emotions and doesn't help the team win that should have won. Just thought I'd say that.

Biblical praise has its reasons. It's always taken up in the wonder of another which is why it's so unnatural for us. And here are the two ultimate reasons for praise.

What God has done and who he is. And how do we praise God? Three to five. Praise him with the trumpet sound. Praise him with the lute and harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and dance. Praise him with the strings and pipe. Praise him with sounding cymbals and the loud clashing cymbals. There's nothing cerebral about this.

This is praise which engages mind, body, voice and heart. Have you noticed that throughout the book of the Psalms we have poetry set to music and here you have trumpets for the loud national and solemn occasions.

[16:17] You have timbrels and dancing for the unencumbered and overflowing joy and you have the pipe and the flute for the personal simple music making. And what is important for us is that there is no one biblically sanctioned musical instrument for praise.

Despite the objections to that point of view neither is there one biblically right style of music. You see Psalm 150 forever puts an end to the argument that one style of music is intrinsically pleasing to God while others are not. Have you ever noticed when people argue for one style of music in church?

It's usually the style that they like. See music is a very precious gift from God that we seem like many other of his gifts to made it into a battleground.

But music is culturally conditioned and its expression changes from country to country and culture to culture. I mean if we were in Africa today we would be singing different music.

[17:29] If we were in Australia today we would be singing better music. You see we just we can't take we can't take our music and baptise it as the only music worthy of the praise of God and look down on all the others.

Very important for us because we are going to move into a process where we think about a new organ and I am beginning to hear grumbling in some quarters and defensiveness in others and I am hearing emotionally loaded statements and dismissive statements and they come with a kind of spiritual judgmentalism where if you don't agree with me on my view of music you are less spiritual than I am and if that is the way you are feeling and thinking you must repent and ask God to forgive you because all our discussion of music must be done in the spirit of Psalm 150 we do not meet here so that you can express yourself and enjoy your particular style of music we gather here to learn the new song of praise to God to hear his word to train ourselves in the languages of heaven so that every song and every piece of music in this church must begin hallelujah sing to Jesus and must finish hallelujah sing to Jesus and part of our rejoicing in God is rejoicing in one another and part of our rejoicing in one another is not allowing taste to divide us if you are an organ only person Psalm 150 calls on you to take joy in your brothers and sisters who are guitar players organ only person and if your taste is country and western I'm sorry got to draw the line somewhere and it is true that style of music can put people off and perhaps Psalm 150 would argue for a greater variety of our musical style it's not saying to us that we cannot have a preference but it is saying to us that what matters what really matters is not the style of music whether we love one another and whether when the outsider comes into our church they go away after it saying God was in their midst everything we do here is to serve the gospel of our Lord

Jesus Christ besides people work in service of the Lord Jesus the people who teach Sunday school are doing so in service of the gospel of the Lord Jesus the clergy out front are supposed to be serving the Lord Jesus Terry Fullerton and the choir are there to serve the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and Psalm 150 tells us that it's not the professionalism or the performance that makes our music pleasing to God it's not the style or the genius even though those things are helpful it's whether we worship God in spirit and in truth it's whether we speak the truth from our hearts he is not volume or instrumentation or emotion or connection but a well tuned heart and what fires our praise is the exceeding greatness of our God who's made us for himself who sent his son into the world to live for us and die for us and to bring salvation to us and bring us to heaven and so we finish let everything that has breath praise the Lord praise the Lord when you come to church and when you stand and sing it's okay if you don't feel like it because what you are doing is you are helping the person next to you and the person in front of you and you are pleasing

God who takes delight in you by dragging your soul out of its self-absorption for a moment and placing it where it belongs in the presence of God where God can enlarge it and as you do it remember Jesus is not ashamed to call you friend nor is he ashamed to call those around you friend and then let everything that has breath praise the Lord to the end of their breath to the maker of our breath amen this digital audio file along with many others is available from the St. John's Shaughnessy website at www.stjohnschaughnessy.org that address is www.stjohns-s-h-a-u-g-h-n-e-s-s-y-dot-o-r-g on the website you will also find information about ministries worship services and special events at St. John's

[23 : 00] Shaughnessy we hope that this message has helped you and that you will share it with others thank you you Thank you.