

Eternal Praise

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me in your Bible, if you have one, to Psalm 150, or we will have the text up on the screens as well.

Today's the concluding installment in our series in the Psalms. As we've said, the Psalms are a collection of songs and prayers written by several different people over several hundred years that were gradually collected together into a song book or prayer book for the ancient Israelites.

The Psalms have been sung and prayed and memorized by many generations of Jews and Christians throughout history. We've entitled this sermon series Songs of Hope in Uncertain Times because that's what the Psalms are.

The Psalms meet us in the midst of a world of turmoil and uncertainty, and they help us to approach God and draw near to God through prayer. So we've come to the concluding Psalm, the last one, Psalm 150.

Let me read this for us this morning. Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary. Praise him in his mighty heavens.

[1 : 0 6] Praise him for his mighty deeds. Praise him according to his excellent greatness. 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 cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. I wonder when have you experienced a preview of something glorious? I can remember back to the day when I received my college acceptance letter.

Back in the day, you didn't go to a website. You had to wait for it to come in the mail. And so I came home from high school. It was a late afternoon in mid-December. However, my younger sister and brother, somewhat unusually, greeted me eagerly at the door and said, you have to open this.

It's a big, thick envelope. Right? Back then, if you got a thin envelope, like just a letter, like a one-page letter, it probably meant you were rejected or maybe deferred. But if you had a thick envelope, it was a bunch of papers that was preparing you for your next four years.

[2 : 1 8] Now, that envelope was not glorious. Right? It had a bunch of papers, eventually made its way to the recycling bin. But what that envelope promised, what it pointed forward to, was a quite significant four years of my life.

It's what brought me here to New Haven. And what eventually brought me here to Trinity. Or if you're married, maybe you can think back to the day you got engaged.

Right? Now, getting engaged is much more significant than any other day or any other experience of receiving a nice piece of jewelry. Right? You get a nice piece of jewelry.

Maybe you admire it, look forward to wearing it for a while. But you get an engagement ring and you look forward to spending the rest of your life with the one who gave it to you. Every time you see that ring, you're reminded of the future that it represents.

Or maybe you've been part of a band or an orchestra or a choir rehearsing together for an upcoming performance. Now, rehearsals, again, rehearsals in themselves aren't always glorious.

[3 : 18] They can be tedious and repetitive. There's a lot of waiting involved. Maybe this year you've had to figure out how to rehearse remotely. I don't know what that's like, but I suspect that's even more challenging.

But despite all the challenges, rehearsing along with a group of people increases the anticipation for the performance to come. Or maybe you've been part of an athletic team, a sports team, practicing together for an upcoming tournament.

The practice, again, practices aren't that glorious in themselves. They might be tough. They might be exhausting. The coach is yelling at everybody all the time. You're repeating the same drills over and over. But it's all building your anticipation for the next big game.

Or even just previews on a more mundane level. You come home from work or from running errands and you're tired and you're hungry and you walk in the door and you're greeted with the smell of a favorite meal cooking on the stove or an apple pie baking in the oven.

Now the smell all by itself doesn't satisfy your hunger, but it's a strong assurance that points you forward to that great and good reality to come. There are all kinds of things in this world that awaken our anticipation, that are little previews of something greater and more glorious to come.

[4 : 41] And that's what this last psalm is meant to be. It's meant to be a preview of a glorious eternity of uninterrupted praise.

It's a conclusion to the psalms and it's the conclusion to which our lives are meant to be directed. So I want us to spend some time listening to this preview of eternity.

Catching a glimpse through it of the great and glorious future that God has promised to bring about and in a way rehearsing together for it. Because that's what this psalm is inviting us to do is to rehearse together for a glorious eternity.

In order to do all this, I want to look at this psalm from three vantage points. So first I want to look at Psalm 150 in itself. Second, I want to zoom out and look at Psalm 150 as the conclusion to the psalms.

And third, I want to look at Psalm 150 as the conclusion to our lives. So first, the psalm in itself. Then, psalm as the conclusion to the book of Psalms. Then, psalm as the conclusion to our lives.

[5 : 42] So, let's start with looking at the psalm in itself. Now, this is not a complicated psalm. There's only one verb. It's repeated 13 times.

Praise, right? Praise the Lord. It's a short, straightforward, loud, and clear psalm. Verse 1 tells us where the Lord should be praised.

And the answer is everywhere. On earth and in heaven. In his sanctuary. That is, in his temple. The temple was the particular place that God had promised to meet with his people who gathered on earth in the Old Testament.

But also in heaven. In his mighty heavens. That's literally in the expanse of his might. That word expanse is the word used in Genesis 1 to describe the sky above.

Sort of the vastness of the universe over which God reigns. So, everywhere. Everywhere in the whole universe. On earth and in heaven. God is worthy to be praised.

[6 : 42] Verse 2 tells us why the Lord should be praised. And the answer is because of everything he is and everything he's done. For his mighty deeds. His acts of wonder. His displays of power.

The great things he's done. The scriptures are full of accounts of God's mighty deeds. That are meant to awaken us to praise him. You know, the Israelites would have thought primarily of the exodus.

As one of those great and mighty deeds of God. God rescuing the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Bring them out so they could worship him freely. Or the return from exile of God.

God graciously bringing his people back home. After they had been scattered among the nations because of their sin. In the New Testament we see the miracles of Jesus.

Healing the sick and feeding the hungry. Cleansing the lepers and liberating the captives. And raising the dead. All of these great and mighty works of God. But the Bible isn't only a sort of highlight film of God's great and mighty deeds.

[7 : 45] The Bible also introduces us to the character. To the person of God himself. It says, praise God for his mighty deeds and according to his excellent greatness.

That is, because of his inherent worth. Because of not just what he does for us. Which is great. But ultimately because of who he is. At the core of his very being.

The scriptures introduce us to the character of a God who is full of steadfast love. That is, unwavering commitment to his people. Who is full of compassion and mercy.

That is, he's not only, has not only decided to be committed to us. But that he is affectionate toward us. He has a deep feeling for us. Scriptures talk about God's wisdom.

That's infinite and inscrutable. That is, we can't fathom the depths of it. Talks about God's justice. Rock solid. Like the mighty mountains.

[8 : 46] So, praise the Lord everywhere. Praise the Lord because of everything he is. And everything he does. Verse 3 to 5 go on to tell us. How we should praise the Lord. And the answer is, with everything we have.

Verses 3 to 5 mention a whole bunch of instruments. Wind instruments. Stringed instruments. Rhythm instruments. Some instruments were used for solemn national occasions.

Like the trumpet. That was used to sort of summon people to a solemn assembly in the Old Testament. Or to announce an important occasion.

There were also instruments for sort of joyful community celebrations. Things like the lute and the harp. The tambourine and dancing. Those are sort of common elements of, you know, a block party.

Or a sort of a community celebration. That was full of joy. As well as instruments that were used in more casual everyday life at home.

[9 : 43] The strings and the pipe or the flute. Those were instruments back then that were more common for people to have in their homes. Somebody would just be sort of strumming along late into the evening around a fire.

You see, here's the point. The psalms are not just meant to be read aloud or recited. But sung and put to music. In a whole variety of settings.

Over the centuries, the psalms have been put to music. In nearly every culture that has been influenced by the Bible. They have put these psalms to music. And put the praises of God into music.

In a whole variety of ways. And I think this psalm indicates that the praises of God are meant to be sung in a wide variety of musical styles.

Right? Formal and informal. Solemn and joyful. Quiet and loud. It's not either or. It's a both and. So we shouldn't become overly attached to only one musical style.

[10 : 42] To the exclusion of all others. No, we can celebrate the wide variety of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs that God's people have produced. And continue to produce around the world.

And across the centuries. In order to lead God's people to praise. So God's worthy to be praised with everything we have. And finally, verse 6 tells us who should praise the Lord.

And the answer is everybody. Everybody. Everywhere. For everything. Everybody. Praise the Lord. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. If you're alive and breathing, that means you are included in this summons.

So that's what the psalm is saying. It's pretty simple. You don't. It's not complicated. You don't need. Anybody can understand what this psalm is calling us to do.

Right? Everywhere. Everyone. Praise the Lord for everything that he is and everything he's done. So that's what this message. That's what this psalm is saying in itself. But now I want to step back a little bit.

[11 : 43] And consider Psalm 150 as the conclusion to the book of Psalms. Now when we began this series, we pointed out that within the book of Psalms, there are actually five books.

So if you open your Bible to the beginning of Psalms, it will say book one. And then if you go to Psalm 42, there will be a little note that says book two. If you go to Psalm 73, it will then say book three.

And et cetera. So there are five collections of Psalms within what we have as the book of Psalms. And that's very similar to the first five books of the Bible, which were known and have been known for years as the five books of Moses.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. And now we don't know exactly how or when these sort of five books of Psalms were collected. Some people think book one was collected first.

It has almost all Psalms of David. Some of the later books have a more variety of authors. We don't really know how or when it all happened, but we can know at least partly why that's the case.

[12 : 55] You see, just as the five books of Moses are sort of a complete collection of God's good instruction associated with the central figure of Moses, the five books of the Psalms are given to us as a complete collection of God's good instruction associated with the central figure of David.

Particularly about how do we approach God in prayer. Now, over the last three months, we've looked at a wide variety of Psalms.

Sort of we've gone through from the beginning to the end and sort of hit several of the highlights. So we've looked at Psalms of lament, which are crying out to God in the midst of distress. We've looked at Psalms of confession, crying out to God for forgiveness for our sin.

Psalms of history, reflecting back on the past. Psalms of prophecy, looking forward to the future. Psalms of wisdom, reflecting on God's law and God's wisdom and God's ways. Psalms of trust, resting quietly in God's presence.

And Psalms of worship. And we've seen that these Psalms are written out of all different kinds of life circumstances. And they help us to approach God starting from right where we are.

[14 : 09] Now, at first glance, and as we've gone through the Psalms, it can seem like the different kinds of Psalms are just sort of thrown together, all jumbled and all mixed together.

Right? They're not neatly grouped together. You can't go to the Psalms and say, well, where are all the Psalms of trust? Well, they're sort of everywhere.

Right? Where are all the Psalms of history? Well, they're sort of concentrated here, but they're also here. And, you know, that's sort of like how we experience life. Right? Life doesn't, we don't experience life in neatly divided categories that are completely separate from one another.

Right? We don't have one day of lament and then one week of complete praise and one day where we really need to confess our sins. You know, all those things are mixed together in our lives.

And so life is a jumbled mix of beauty and brokenness, joy and sorrow, spiritual triumph and spiritual defeat. But the Psalms help us to turn to God in the midst of all that we're experiencing.

[15 : 12] But we haven't, I don't think we've pointed this out yet, but when you look a little closer, there is actually an important progression within the book of Psalms. So they're not actually just jumbled and mixed all together.

There's an important progression if you go from beginning to end. So let me give you some data for this. The lament Psalms, remember lament Psalms are crying out to God in the midst of distress and need, are concentrated heavily at the beginning of the book.

So in book one, two-thirds of the Psalms are laments. In book two and three, it's at least half. But in book four and book five, the lament Psalms take a back seat and the praise Psalms come to the foreground.

So the proportions get roughly flipped. Only a quarter of the Psalms in books four and five are lament Psalms and at least half are praise Psalms.

Now even more, at the end of each of the five book of Psalms, there is a word of praise. So if you have a Bible, go to Psalm 41, 13. That's the end of book one.

[16 : 22] That verse says, Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen. And then go to Psalm 72, verse 18, the end of book two.

Again, praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. Praise be to his glorious name forever. May the whole earth be filled with his glory.

Amen and amen. Then go to the end of book three, the end of Psalm 89. Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen and amen. Then go to the end of book four.

Guess what? Same thing. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. And let all the people say, Amen, praise the Lord, Psalm 106, 48. Every book within the Psalms ends with a word of praise.

And then you get to the end of book five and it explodes. Because you don't just get a verse or two of praise. You don't even just get a whole psalm or two of praise. You get five whole psalms.

[17 : 23] 146, 147, 148, 149, 150. They all begin and end with the words, Hallelujah, which means praise the Lord.

So book five ends with an outpouring of praise. If you look at Psalm 146, it's a psalm of individual praise. I will praise the Lord as long as I live.

You see, God's praises spring up in the hearts of every individual person who has been born anew by the Spirit of God. And then Psalm 147 is a psalm of corporate praise.

It says it begins with, it is good to sing praises to our God. So it's, we see sort of God's people gathering together as we do in church to praise the Lord together.

Psalm 148 gets even wider. It's a psalm of cosmic praise. It begins, praise the Lord from the heavens. Not only God's people individually, not only God's people corporately, but all of God's creation in heaven and on earth bears witness to his greatness and power.

[18 : 34] Psalm 149 is a psalm of evangelistic praise. It says, sing to the Lord a new song. In other words, it's summoning the nations to join in praising the Lord.

God's praise being declared to the ends of the earth. His powerful word represented as the sword of the Spirit going out to the nations.

And then Psalm 150 is the conclusion. Individual praise, corporate praise, cosmic praise, evangelistic praise. And Psalm 150 is the conclusion. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

So it ends the book with a bang. Derek Kidner, who I think is one of the most helpful commentators on the Psalms, put it this way. Five joyous psalms of praise bring the Psalter to a close.

So, he says, the Psalms are a miniature of our story, which will end in unbroken blessing and delight. You see, the journey that the Psalms are taking us on is a journey through lament into praise.

[19 : 41] That's the progression you see through the book of Psalms. And so, third, we've looked at the Psalm in itself, calling us that praise the Lord everywhere, everyone, for everything.

And we've looked at the Psalm as the conclusion of that movement within the book from lament to praise. And now I want to consider this Psalm as the conclusion to which our lives are meant to be oriented.

The preview of a glorious eternity that we're meant to start rehearsing for even now. You see, our lives are meant to follow that movement from lament to praise.

You know, think about it this way. Every one of us began our lives lamenting. Right? Have you ever seen a baby be born?

If you have, what's the first thing the baby does? Wah! Wah! Wah! Right? That's actually a sign of health. If the baby doesn't cry at all, you get worried.

[20 : 55] Right? But that's the only way a baby can communicate is crying out for help from beyond him or herself. Every one of us came into the world desperately needy, crying out for help that we could not provide for ourselves.

And the Bible says that's also the way that we enter into the kingdom of God. In fact, the Bible calls it being born again. You see, when we cry out to God in our sinful and afflicted state saying, Lord, help me!

Save me! Cleanse me! Feed me! I can't do these things for myself! I need you! That's the only way to become a Christian. You know, you can't become a Christian by being a good person or by doing religious deeds.

You can only become a Christian by recognizing your desperate need for God's mercy and turning to Jesus as the one who has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. You see, we all begin our lives, our physical life and our spiritual life, lamenting.

And rightly so. And you know, as we grow up as people, and especially as we grow up as followers of Jesus, as we become more aware of our own brokenness and our own spiritual neediness, and also the brokenness of the world around us, and how twisted the world is and disordered this world has become.

[22 : 24] And so our laments don't stop. They don't disappear. They actually grow deeper and broader and more earnest. It's sort of interesting.

Book one of the Psalms has mostly individual laments. Basically, people calling out to God about their own troubles. But in book two and three, there's a lot of communal laments, where basically people are looking at the world around them, or looking at the church, sort of the people of Israel, right?

God's people gather together and crying out to God and saying, Lord, we've fallen so far short. The world is such a mess. Come and judge the world and make things right.

Come save us. Redeem us. Do something, Lord. Some of the most poignant laments crying out to God from the deepest darkness are in places like Psalm 88 at the end of book three, in the middle of the Psalms.

You see, here's the point. The Psalms don't paint a picture of a spiritual life that just gets easier and rosier and happier every day. That's not the promise of the Christian life that Jesus gives to his disciples.

[23 : 35] Sometimes life gets harder and not easier, and our laments grow deeper and more earnest and broader. Sometimes Jesus leads us to come alongside others and sort of take their troubles as our own and lament with them and lament for them and bear with them.

But the Psalms don't leave us in a cycle of unending lament. Slowly but surely, they lead us through lament into praise.

And in fact, many of the Psalms of lament actually end with a verse or two of praise. Not all of them, but many of them do. Or a word of trust, a word of hope.

Even those lament Psalms are sort of pointing us forward to the end of the book. And when we come to the end, we see that the final word in the life of a Christian is praise.

You know, I think one of the signs of spiritual maturity in an older person is a kind of contentment. Not apathy or carelessness, but a kind of steadiness and gratitude.

[24 : 49] You know, it's what the Apostle Paul wrote about in Philippians 4, which was written sort of not quite at the end of his life, but after, probably toward the end of his life, in the latter half of his life.

He wrote, You see, we begin the Christian life by saying, Help me, Lord.

I need you. But the more we move toward the conclusion of the Christian life, the more we can look back and say, Thank you, Lord. You've been faithful.

Praise you. You're worthy to be praised. You see, that's the journey the Psalms and the Bible as a whole is leading us on. From lament, from crying out to God to save us, which is the only way we can begin, towards ending in praise and trust.

You see, praise begins when we turn our eyes to the Lord, and when we see that God is still on the throne, even over this crazy world. And praise continues when we see how God has intervened in the world to set things right, how he intervened in the Bible, in the Old Testament, to save the people from slavery and to bring them home from exile, how he intervened in a million other little ways throughout history, but above all, how God intervened by sending his Son.

[26 : 38] By sending his Son into the world to pay for our sins once and for all, and to rise triumphant over death and the grave. And one day he'll come back to put everything right forever, and one day in the light of his eternal glory, when heaven and earth will be made new, all our tears will be wiped away, and all our laments will turn into praise.

His eternal glory will outweigh and outlast all the disappointments and all the unfulfilled hopes of this present age. And the praise of God's people will never again be interrupted.

Psalm 150 is a preview of that glorious day, when there will be nothing but praise, forever and ever. Now on occasion, I have heard some people object to this vision of unending praise.

I've heard people say things like, a world of endless praise would not be worth living in, it would be boring. If there were no challenges, no contrasts, no conflicts, only endless peace and praise, we would all get tired of it.

After a few years, isn't that what happens when people retire from their jobs and think they'll be happy sitting at home doing nothing? They get bored, because they lack purpose. But there are several problems with that objection.

[27 : 57] And the deepest problem with that objection is it assumes that the kind of life that we experience right now in this world is the only kind of life that we can ever or will ever experience.

It assumes that God cannot surprise us. And it also wrongly assumes that the Christian view of eternal life is basically our present experience of life in this world stretched out for an endless amount of time.

But in the Christian understanding, the eternal life that Jesus promises is qualitatively different.

It's not just immortality going on forever. It's a whole new kind of life in union with Jesus that begins now and continues into eternity. And it's a kind of life, the kind of life we will experience in eternity.

This present world only gives us previews of that kind of life. In the Bible, eternal life is compared to a wedding banquet, a flesh and blood reunion of long separated lovers.

[29 : 13] It's compared to citizenship in the city where God himself dwells. It's compared to ruling over a renewed heaven and earth. When the Bible talks about entering into an eternal Sabbath rest, that doesn't mean endlessly doing nothing.

No, it's talking about entering into the kind of rest that God has enjoyed from the beginning. That is delighting in his completed work.

That's what Sabbath rest means in the Bible. It's not just doing nothing. It means delighting in God's completed work. And we will enter into that delight.

1 Corinthians 2.9 says, No eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. You see, if you read the Bible, one thing you will see about the character of God is he is a God of surprises.

God raised Jesus from the dead, and that was a surprise to every last one of his followers. And if God could do that, then surely we have many glorious surprises awaiting us in eternity that we will not be able to guess in advance, and that we cannot fathom in our present limited experience in this world.

[30 : 36] We will find ourselves with even more reasons to praise God than we already have today. And so the summons that Psalm 150 extends to us is to begin rehearsing for that everlasting song of praise right here and right now.

As we sang in that great hymn, Here I raise my Ebenezer, Here by thy great help I've come, and I hope by thy good pleasure safely to arrive at home.

There's another line that sometimes is included in that hymn that says, Sorrowing I shall be in spirit till released from flesh and sin. In other words, we'll still be lamenting throughout our lives, Yet from what I do inherit, Hear thy praises I'll begin.

You see, we begin that song of praise that we're going to sing for all eternity. Now, our songs of praise today will inevitably be halting and imperfect.

Just like a rehearsal for a performance, it might sometimes seem repetitive, it might sometimes seem like there's a lot of waiting involved, sometimes we'll sing off-key and out of tune, and other people will sing off-key and out of tune, we'll get interrupted, we'll get distracted, but one day, the glory of God will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea, and the praises of God's people will never end.

[32 : 13] One day, the shadows will disappear, and we'll see our Savior face to face more than anything else that we are anticipating in this world. Psalm 150 calls us to anticipate that great day to come.

At the end of his book, *The City of God*, written in a time of turmoil and upheaval in the ancient world, the church leader, Augustine, wrote these words, How great shall be that happiness, which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good, and which shall afford leisure for the praises of God who shall be all in all.

True honor shall be there, true peace shall be there, God himself, who is the author of virtue, shall there be its reward. We shall be perfectly at rest, and shall perfectly know that he is God, and there we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise.

This is what shall be in the end without end. Brothers and sisters, as we begin this new year, may we be a people who praise the Lord.

Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for the great things you have done and for your consistent character.

[33 : 41] Lord, so many reasons we have to praise you. Thank you for this psalm, which gives us a glimpse of the world without end when we will praise you, when we will see you face to face and love you for whom we have longed and praise you with unending joy.

Lord, even as we continue to lament the brokenness of this world and as we call out to you in our own personal needs, Lord, make us a people who look to you, who look to your mighty deeds, who look ahead to your promises, which are sure and certain, who trust that you are a God who wonderfully surprises us, who can and will do far more than we can ask or think.

Lord, grant that we might be a people of praise and grant that our songs of praise may be an invitation to others in this world to join in that song, praising you who are worthy, who are worthy of our praise and glory.

Pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.