

The Universal Choir

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Grab your Bibles and let's go back to the book of Psalms. I have greatly enjoyed studying back through these Psalms but I'm about to run out of them. We're on Psalm 149 and the rich blessings of, 148, I'm sorry, the rich blessings of God's truth that comes screaming out of this text. And, once again, you're reminded of how the Bible is one book. If you don't grasp the doctrines of grace that come into full development through the New Testament text, you don't get the glories of what the Psalmist is talking about here.

Psalm 148:1, by the way, before I begin reading, God is absolutely enamored with himself. He is just absolutely thrilled with being who he is and God is, can I use the word "obsessed" in a good sense? He's obsessed with his own glory because when you're God, you can't be impressed with anything less than God. You don't impress him. Nothing impresses him, but then God looks in the mirror and says, "Ah, that's something." And for God it's not ego and it's not arrogance and it's not pride, it's just true. Are you with me? He's got the perfect, perfect capacity to estimate what's wonderful and glorious and great, and so when he looks at everything else, he's disappointed until he looks at himself.

So the Psalmist compiles these and he comes to a point where he's just overwhelmed with this God who is worthy of all praise. Verse 1, Psalm 148,

1 Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! 2 Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! 3 Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light! 4 Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens! 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created. 6 He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away. 7 Praise the LORD from the earth, Sea monsters and all deeps; 8 Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word; 9 Mountains and all hills; Fruit trees and all cedars; 10 Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and winged fowl; 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth; 12 Both young men and virgins; Old men and children. 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven. 14 And He has lifted up a horn for His people, [that's Jesus] Praise for all His

godly ones; Even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!

One commentator writer reminded us that man was last in the order of creation, but man has first seat in the choir of praise. All of creation as we know it today is presently subdued under a curse. Man's sin has somehow affected the created order, and so while there's a sense in which, I believe today, everything that is is praising the Lord, yet it's muted, if you will. I believe it's dulled, it's not near what it ought to be, and one day when God glorifies his own and beautifies his elect church, that's us and everyone else who's a true believer, and then removes the curse from all the created order, then man will lead all of creation in this ever building, resounding praise to God, and that's what the Psalmist is actually talking about, the redeemed leading all that is to bring God the glory, honor, and praise he deserves.

Well, a couple of quick things. I. The regions of praise. Notice, he wants all regions of reality, everything that is, to bring him praise. Verse 1, things above would be sub point under the regions of praise, things above would be A. He says, "Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!" So the Lord says, "If you look up and if you consider everything that is above, everything that is above, Praise God," and should be praising God. You might just call it the upper realms should be praising God.

In verse 2, he continues on, "Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!" That's the inhabitants of the upper heavens. Now, that's all a mystery to us. We have some insight from biblical truth about the inhabitants of the realms of heavenly glories but it's just a mystery to us. But the Psalmist says, "All of those should be praising the Lord."

And continuing in this upward look, verse 3, "Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light!" Now, I believe there's a sense in which every time the sun rises in the morning it's saying, "Praise the Lord!" Every time a star twinkles in a still summer's night, it's twinkling, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!" Everything that is in the upper regions is giving perpetual praise to the Lord. Someone said they are a continual lamp burning before the high altar of God. Light is the song of praise to the eye as sound is to the ear, and the sun praises God in brilliance, brightness, power and in warmth but, once again, there is a mutedness that will one day birth forth. Listen, everything centers on God's full redemption of his church. The church is the centerpiece of all that God is doing and all that God is going to do for his own glory and for his own praise, and this Psalm is centered on that great and glorious time when the church comes to its full point of redemption, that is, in glorification and then the curse is moved and then all of this. Folks, it's going to be a, I hate to sound like Elf on the movie, a ginormous, it's going to be, I don't have the vocabulary, I'm sorry. It's going to be stupendous beyond imagination, all the rapture of glorious praise unto God. You won't forget that, will you, ginormous. You'll take that home with you, won't you?

Then he says something interesting in verse 4 as he continues exhorting us to praise him, "Praise Him, highest heavens." We're not sure all that that means but I believe what it

means is that if you climb in the heavens as high as heaven is above the earth, in other words, if you go up to the heavens and go to the heaven of heavens, still that realm as high and lofty as that is, must humble itself in gladness to praise the Lord. There can be none so great or so high to be above praising Jehovah. The highest must praise him.

Now, there is a phrase here that scholars have no idea what it means and we can just kind of speculate about it, then he says in verse 4, "And the waters that are above the heavens!" Well, some would say that that just means the clouds but that's not what the phrase says, it's the waters above the heavens. The terrestrial heavens is where the birds fly, the clouds are, but this is the water above that. So there's a water of some sort in the heaven of heavens and someone speculated that the waters above the heaven perhaps speaks of reservoirs that are fed literally by the streams of life flowing from the Almighty and Omnipotent throne. They're just realms we don't know anything about.

Isn't it interesting that secular scientists and, by the way, if you're a godly or God-centered scientists, you're completely silenced and rebuffed today. You can't even hardly speak your perspective anymore. By the way, true modern science was birthed in a strong biblical, God-centered perspective. You would not have modern science if it weren't for Christian men who believe God created things with order and structure and we can discover how God did it, or at least something of how God did it. It's only in recent ages that men have become so godless in their scientific work, but nonetheless, God-centered men see the greatness of God in all that God has done, but not nearly as we're, or to the extent that we're going to see it one day.

Then when he says the phrase in verse 4, "the highest heavens," again, I think that is just a further amplification that he saying all the unknown, unexplained phenomenon in the universe is all to be praising the Lord. The Psalmist is stretching himself to squeeze every molecule of the very farthest extents of the unexplained universe to render glorious praise to God.

Now, not only things above under the regions of praise, B. we talk about the things below. We see this beginning in verse 7, so the Psalmist shifts his attention, he's looking downward now. First of all, he talks about the deepest creatures in the bowels of the earth. Verse 7, "Praise the LORD from the earth, Sea monsters and all deeps." Now, the word "monsters" there is just a word. Someone might skeptically complain, "Now, wait a minute, there are no sea monsters." Well, I'm not so sure about that. I remember I was in Florida, I was a college student. Me and a buddy had gone down there and there was a man in a hotel room beside us that had no legs and what he did, I mean, every day his family would take him out to the rail and he would sit there and just watch the ocean, I mean, literally all day long, and we struck up a conversation, really a friendship with the guy. He was a very friendly man and what happened, he had spent his whole life working on sea barges and they would just go around the world and from these giant ocean barges they would work on things and usually it was oil pipelines and however and wherever they channeled the oil through pipes in the bottom of the sea floor. And he told us about one time when one of their divers was down on the very bottom of the ocean and was working on one of those pipes and he said the man said a fish came, it wasn't a shark, but

a fish came up to him and he said it was the biggest fish he had ever seen in his entire life. He said a few moments later the line broke and we've never seen that guy again. He has no idea what got him. He said on the ocean floor, he said, we would go down there sometimes on the ocean floor and our giant steel pipes will be twisted into knots on the ocean floor.

But we don't know all that goes on in the depths of the ocean. Every now and then you'll see something in an article, "Well, we discovered a creature we didn't know existed any longer." Or, "I thought it was extinct." But anyway, the point of the Psalmist is, you go to the very depths of any part of life in the earth and all of that is to be praising the Lord. I just kind of threw together some thoughts whether it's a jewfish or a jellyfish, a grouper or a goldfish, a shark or small mouth bass, a sail fish or a sun perch, a trigger fish or a tadpole, a tiger shark or a tuna, they all praise the Lord. Not like they're going to, but they all praise the Lord.

So's he's looking downward and, first of all, he looks at the deepest creatures. Notice the Psalmist's effort, the highest of the heavens and the depths of ocean creatures. Now he talks about the dimensions of climate, verse 8, he says, "Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word." So how do these things praise the Lord? Well, fire gets hot and when it gets hot it's saying, "Praise the Lord! God made me hot." Hail comes down hard and it comes down hard saying, "Praise the Lord!" Snow comes blowing in the cold and, my friend, when we see these systems come through and there are tornadoes and there are violent things and there are difficult things and things that cause us to be cold and cause us to be fearful, it's just another little touch of God's majesty and God is saying, "I am the all powerful one." He's to be feared, he's to be honored, he's to be praised. And all of these work in loving obedience to God, Amos 5:21-24 points that out.

He goes a little further. He talks about just the physical earth itself in verse 9, "Mountains and all hills; Fruit trees and all cedars." Everything that's on the earth ought to be praising the Lord. I believe it's the prophet Isaiah that talks about when the Lord returns, that when the earth is lifted from the curse, and I don't know if he's using metaphor or he's speaking literally, but he talks about the trees of the field will clap their hands. Remember that? The trees of the field will clap their hands. It's a picture of the Lord coming to the earth that he has redeemed by his own blood and, by the way, he didn't only redeem the souls of men, he has redeemed the created order back to God. He has removed the curse. He has earned the right to hold the title deed to all of it. It's just he's waiting for the day to come and occupy what he owns. Listen, there is not one square inch on this entire earth anywhere where Jesus cannot rightfully put his finger and say, "It's mine."

So when Jesus comes back, cleanses the created order of its curse, the Bible says creation itself will be so full of exaltation and excitement that the trees of the field are going to clap their hands. It's amazing. An oak tree is going to lean over to the elm tree and they are going to clap their hands. The dogwood tree will lean over to the cedar tree and they're going to clap their hands. Like I've told you before, the weeping willow, I guess, will just go...and just praise the Lord. The Psalmist is warning you to get something here.

Look, God's just not a component. He's not just a part. Religion, at least true religion, is not just a slice in the pie of a good balanced life. God is the center and the totality of everything. It is all about him and one day it will all be pointed back to him in honor to him, in praise to him, and in glory to him. And even as we sit on this earth today and we watch the godlessness that just seems to be exploding all around us, I'm telling you, every event is sovereignly being controlled by a perfect God to the perfect ends that one day he will get all the glory for it all. He's not the author of evil, but even the evil of men will resound to his praise.

Well, still looking at the earth, of course, he moves to verse 10, all earthly creatures, "Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and winged fowl." So no matter what it is on the face of the earth, they're all here, and they all are, and they're all going to praise the Lord.

He moves further, verses 11 and 12, talking about all the peoples of the earth. First he talks about the high and lofty, "Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth; Both young men and virgins; Old men and children." I like what one guy said, he said, you know, it's kind of interesting how the Psalmist picked out certain types of folks and he mentioned old man and that's because of all those who are inexcusable to praise God, it is old men, because they have lived long enough to see more of God's goodness and faithfulness than the other folks. Old men ought to say, "God is good. God is faithful. God is wonderful and he has been wonderful to me."

Friend, is it not every day, in every hour, in every moment under the severe mercy of God. Every moment that you and I exist, we are enveloped in the great mercies of God. You know, I feel like even in a church like you that loves the truth and loves your pastor, still we're like fighting through a big, thick, wet, cardboard box to get our hearts and minds back God-centered because of the filthy world we live in that just crushes and holds back and washes out and deters the praise for God that we want to have in our hearts. That's why you need to come to church. You need to get it preached back into you once a week; get the God-centeredness back in your thinking and back in your soul. Well, that's something of the regions of praise, the whole created order invoked to praise the Lord and, again, I see redeemed man and that's going to come out strongly here in a moment, redeemed man leading a redeemed creation all in resounding glorious praise to God.

Now, let's talk about the reasons of praise and it's so important that we see Christ in the center of this and, again, if you don't see Christ in the center of this, I think you miss, you don't miss most of it, you miss everything. First of all, notice there was a praise, certainly, for his work of creation. As a matter of fact, would you turn over to Colossians 1. Are you talented enough to turn to Colossians 1 and not lose Psalm 148? Keep a ribbon in it. That's what I've done. I keep a ribbon in one of them and I turn over to the other one and go to Colossians 1, if you would, and we're going to go back and forth real quick here in the last 15 minutes or so. You might even get out a little bit early tonight. First of all, notice we're seeing Christ in his work of creation and that is a reason to praise and glorify him.

In verse 5 of Psalm 148 it says, "Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created." So by his spoken word he created all that is. You go over to Colossians 1:16 says, "For by Him," that's Jesus, "all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him." He commanded and they were all created. Just a word, ex nihilo, which means something came out of nothing. God speaks and something came out of nothing. One time there was nothing but God and God spoke and created something out of nothing. Hebrews 1:3 says, "Jesus upholds all things by the word of His power." Now think about it: have you watched some of these liberal, secular guys? You know, they come out with new names all the time to sound impressive, secular progressives, they're really secular regressives but all of these guys, they are just not happy about anything. I mean, what have they got to be happy about?

Can I chase a rabbit for a moment? I was just thinking on this, when you raise children in an age where a lot of mothers can literally look at their families and say, "I aborted your little brother but I kept you," when you live in an age where life hangs in the balance of subjective, arbitrary choice, not based on moral, eternal principles but to subjective, arbitrary choice, just out of convenience and, by the way, the overwhelming majority of abortions are convenience abortions, done because the mother felt like this would be a hindrance to them or a difficulty they didn't want have to embrace or deal with. You raise children in that kind of age, what kind of children are they going to be? Why are you shocked when a kid like that feels like they are cheated in life and so they grab a gun and kill 12 or 15 people? Why does that shock you? You've already told them things are just arbitrary and if something gets in your way they're disposable. Have you not? What kind of schizophrenia is that? On the one hand, it's perfectly permissible, on the other hand, it's murder and wrong. It's amazing, and then you raise children in a culture that says every lust that comes across your fallen, depraved heart, you're supposed to experiment and try it out, and we believe the lie. We believe, well, not us, but the culture believed the lie that, well, some people are just born that way so they can't really help it. They say, "Well, if they are born that way, we understand." But you understand, that was a lie. I've been telling that for years. Now they are moving away from that and now they're talking about being fluid in their sexuality. All they mean is whatever perverse thing comes across my heart and mind, I want to be free to explore it and involve myself in it.

In that kind of culture, what's going to be the fall, when those dominoes keep falling, where are we going? I mean, do we really want to live in a country that throws all the moral restraints of the Judeo-Christian ethic out the window? Where is this going? Listen, my friend, God created the sex drive. It's good, it's wonderful, it's a gift from God, but God meant for it to be governed, guarded, and guided. Governed, guarded, and guided. It's just like gasoline. Gasoline is a good thing but you don't throw it around everywhere. And this perverse, godless, the Psalmist said, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." Literally it means, "I'll have nothing to do with God. God's absolute. God's rules, I throw them off." And the consequences and the domino effect of self-destruction enters into a culture that goes down that road.

Well, all I'm saying is that God made us. Jesus spoke us into existence and there is a God and a purpose God made us for and a way we're supposed to function under this God. But the evolutionist, he has no reason to praise. What is the evolutionist going to praise God about? I'll praise anything about anything, but the doctrine of creation demands praise. You see, the voice that says, "Let them be," said, "Let them praise." Some One made us and he deserves all honor, glory and praise.

Well, another word here, not only creation but notice provision or preservation, you could say, that would be B. in this outline as we're seeing Christ and how he should be praised in this Psalm. In verse 6, "He has also established them," he's referring to the physical universe that he just elaborated on in verses 1 through 5. "God established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away." Now, we're back in Colossians again as we see that Christ is the one referred to here. In Colossians 1:17, "He is before all things," now listen, "and in Him all things hold together." Jesus provides for the very being of all things that exist and Jesus provides for the continued being of all things that exist. Everything that is. You stay seated in your seat by what the scientists would call the law of gravity, but in reality, though that is a true way to understand what God has done, in reality, you stay seated by the personal, persistent presence and power of Jesus Christ. Everything holds together by him. Do you see how overwhelmingly in debt to him we are? To Christ. He deserves all the praise. The Bible says he holds everything together forever and ever.

Then exaltation in verse 13 of our Psalm, "Let them praise the name of the LORD, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven." So, again, the highness, the exaltation, and there's a lot to this. I think what it means is the most, now listen to me, don't go to sleep on me, you bother me if you don't listen good: the most astounding accomplishment that has ever or will ever be performed is the work of Jesus Christ saving his people and bringing them all the way to glorification. That's the greatest thing that will ever happen in all the universe for time and eternity. That is the greatest work God has ever done is through his Son Jesus Christ, saving his people, securing his people, and bringing them all home to glory. Now, what he's saying is: you go anywhere you want to go on earth, you go to anywhere you want to go to even the loftiest realms of the highest heaven, and nobody has done anything as great as that. So everybody can just hush and give all the praise to the one who has done the greatest thing imaginable. That's where this is coming from. Don't you love the Bible? There's nothing else like this.

Well, not only exaltation but a close first cousin is glorification of our Psalm. We're back in our Psalm again in verse 13, the first part, "Let them praise the name of the LORD." And then the last phrase, "His glory, his glory is above earth and above heaven." Now, glorification is so akin to exaltation but there is a difference. Where exaltation may refer to the greatest accomplishment, glorification speaks a little more to the grandeur of the accomplishment. He says, "His glory." In other words, nothing in all of heaven and all of earth combined can match the glory of God. I mean, if you put together all the candles and all the lamps and all the spotlights and all the lighthouses and all the laser beams that you can possibly find and that's the earth, he says, his glory is greater than anything we can put together on the earth. Then he includes in the heavens back in verse 13 of our

Psalm. Then you take all the stars and all the suns of all the eons and all the galaxies that are in existence, add them all up together and they're just a fizzled, dim nothing compared to the grandeur of who God is.

Now, this comes to the last thing, salvation, in verse 14. Here we see a portrait of sovereign grace that has a limited fulfillment in Israel but an ultimate and final fulfillment in the church. "He has lifted up a horn for His people, Praise for all His godly ones; Even for the sons of Israel." Well, the New Testament would amplify that and say that those who believe in Jesus are the true Israel. "Even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!" Now, let's ask ourselves: how did Israel get to be a special people? Because God had a contest and said, "Alright, all the peoples of the earth, come before me and let's see who impresses me the most." No, that's not the way it happened at all, is it? God called a man named Abram, Abraham, from the Ur of the Chaldees and said, "I want you to leave your people and leave your relatives and leave your land and go to a land that I'm going to show you and through you I'm going to bring a multitude of descendents and I'll be your God and you'll be my people." Now, they failed but as far as nationally speaking, God elected Israel, and the parallel to that is God elects those who are in his church. He chose them beforehand and he chose them to the end that he might cast that unmerited favor on him, and I love the way the Psalmist does it here, "He lifted up a horn for His people." There's only one way you can understand this, that is that God chose a people and then lifted up a horn to help them and do for them what they could not do for themselves.

What's a horn? Well, we know the Bible uses the phrase "a horn of salvation," and the horn in a biblical or even in an ancient people's understanding is a horn that speaks of strength and dignity and power and authority. The horn is Jesus. The horn is Jesus. Here are a few cross-references. Psalm 132:7, "The horn of David is to spring forth." Who is the horn that is going to spring forth from the line of David? It has to be Jesus. Ezekiel 29:21, "I shall make a horn sprout for the house of David." Who is the horn of strength and dignity and power that will come forth from the lineage of David and secure and save God's elect people? It's Jesus. It's the only person it could be. Psalm 18:2 speaks of "the horn of my salvation," and God, by his own sovereign doings, has raised up a horn of salvation for us out of the lineage of David.

I've organized this in three thoughts to close. First of all, there's the horn of justification which is his power. God has the horn of power in that God is able to take through the work of his Son on our behalf and bring us to that position of justice and justness in his presence. The horn of power speaks of our justification.

Also in the Bible, they would take those old horns, of course, they didn't have stores to buy containers like we have today, but they would take horns and hollow them out and they would use them to hold different items and very often they would hold anointing oil in there, and when they anointed a king or anointed a priest, they would pour the oil out of the horn, a horn of oil, and that speaks of being set apart. And God says, "Through Jesus Christ, I have anointed you and appointed you to be a people set apart for God. You're not just like the other people in the world, you are set apart uniquely unto God."

You're his. He, first of all, through the power of his Son, has set you up as justified in God's sight. Even though you are a sinner and shouldn't be, Jesus has accomplished it. He has poured the anointing oil of sanctification on you, that means set apart for God and for God's special blessing and service.

Then, of course, finally the horn of jubilation. How does he end the Psalm? "God has raised up," verse 14, "He has lifted up," rather, "a horn for His people, Praise for all His godly ones; Even the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!" So when we take in all that God has accomplished for us through Jesus Christ, it resounds in praise and, I guess one of the things that we have to wrestle with on this pilgrimage is, Lord, we have to live down here, we have to work down here. I mean, Paul said, "If you avoid exposure to wicked people in the world you're going to have to leave the world." You have to be around stuff every day you go to work or go to school or whatever you do and you're around praise crushers, stuff that just causes your heart and mind to be away from the greatness and the glories of God, and we keep working to bring ourselves back to have hearts of praise and gratitude and thanksgiving for the great horn of salvation the Lord has raised up for us.

But I want to leave you with that thought that we are all these final eternal choir directors and we are going to, in that day of great glorification, be involved in leading all that is to resounding, ever increasing, and never ending praise to God and it won't be forced and it won't be stretched and it won't be difficult. As a matter of fact, it will just be spontaneous. And David wrote about that what, 700 or so years before even Jesus was born and it's going to happen. Praise the Lord.

Let's stand in prayer, alright?