

JOIN THE SYMPHONY OF PRAISE

Psalm 148: 1-14 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Psalm 148 is a “Hallelujah” psalm. Praise the Lord is the first line and the last line of this beautiful Hebrew poem. Hallelujah means “Praise the Lord.” It’s a divine command for us to join in with all creation in heaven and on earth. I hope for us all, that this is one command of God we are all happy to oblige. The Hallelujah Chorus and all of Handel’s Messiah—a three-hour production played over and over at our house during this past Christmas season. Handel’s has become one of the best-known and widely loved Christmas presentations of all time. You may not know that George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) never conducted “Messiah” during the Christmas season. He intended it to be a choral piece for Lent, prior to Good Friday and Easter. Messiah was completed in twenty-four days. Its premiere performance on April 13, 1742 supported three charities: -- The Society for Relieving Prisoners, the Charitable Infirmary, and Mercer’s Hospital. It is still customary for audiences to stand during the “Hallelujah” chorus, a tradition that began before 1780 and is popularly attributed to King George II, who reputedly stood during the chorus at an early London performance. It is arguably the most famous piece of choral music in human history.

Psalm 148, just like the “Messiah,” an oratorio about Jesus, is a message God is allowing me to preach close to the time of our Christmas celebrations, three days after we took down the Christmas decorations here at church this past Thursday. This Hebrew word, “Hallelujah” is used 24 times in the Old Testament and it is found only in the book of the Psalms. The last five hymns in the book of Psalms all begin and end with this Hebrew word, “Hallelujah!” Our text today, Psalm 148 – is a part of this final collection in the 150 psalms. As we sang to God today, we were praising Him, but praising God is far more than just singing songs and hymns of worship. Psalm 148 is a command for all of creation, heaven, and earth and finally, all of us to praise the LORD, sun and moon, angelic hosts and waters above the heavens, highest heavens and ocean deeps, shining stars, mountains and hills, great sea creatures and stormy wind, fire and hail, snow and mist, beasts and all livestock, fruit trees and all cedars, kings and all peoples, princes and rulers, young men and maidens, and old men and children. Everything that God has created, He has called to join in praising Him. But how do mountains and fruit trees sing Hallelujah to the Lord? We are going to address that question today. God is to be praised uniquely by all of creation because He spoke, v. 5 and everything was created. His word is powerful. We praise Him for He made everything that exists.

Psalm 148 is a poetic catalogue of creation. Everything biological, geological, astronomical, meteorological, yes, everything in the heavens and on, and in the

earth, and even the heaven and earth themselves are called to praise the Lord. Most of the lines in Psalm 148 begin with an imperative summons to praise the Lord—a divine command. “Hallel” in Hebrew is far more than a monotonous, lifeless recitation of “Praise the Lord!” Hallel includes a joyous praising of God in song, boasting in Him and in His goodness. “Hallel” in Hebrew is more than just “Praise.” Twelve times in the ESV I notice exclamation marks in Psalm 148. The English translators put them there. Twelve commands—two more than the ten commandments, combine in this orchestra, symphony, and oratorio—to praise the Lord. Both celebrities and common folk, let us hallel—and praise the Lord!

This Psalm is divided into three main sections, first praises to our Singular Creator from all of heaven and earth in verses 1-10, then secondly, in verses 11-13, praises to our Sustaining Sovereign, and in the final section of verse 14, praises to our Spousal Protector. In each of these three sections, there is a call to join the symphony of praise from somewhere, and then the reason is given for why we are to join the symphony of praising the Lord. Look at the first section. Can anyone see where the praise is coming from? In verses 1-6—it is coming from heaven, and in verses 7-10, it is coming from earth? Therefore, we must join the symphony of praising God because (1) He is the Singular Creator of Heaven and Earth, (2) Secondly, He is the Sustaining Sovereign whose majestic Name only is exalted above every name—v. 11-13, and Finally, in v. 14, (3) He is our Spousal Protector for we are near to Him as His Bride. Now, let’s look at each section one by one and join in this symphony of praise and Hallelujah to the Lord.

JOIN THE SYMPHONY IN PRAISING THE SINGULAR CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. (I.) Look carefully at verses 1-10. 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, creeping things and flying birds!” This is a large two-part section of this psalm—v. 1-6—calling all the heavens to praise the Lord and v. 7-10 calling all the earth to join in the symphony of praise to the Lord. We are reminded here by the psalmist, that all of creation owes its praise to God. Starting with the highest heights of the heaven and down to the waters above the heavens (the rain clouds), all of creation in the heavens, just as the heavens owe their origin to God the singular, only Creator, so we owe our origins to this same singular Creator, and thus all our loyalty, all our worship, all our praise, all our

allegiance and all our adoration belong to the Lord. Thirteen times in these 14 verses, the word “praise” is used. Amazingly, nine of these thirteen occurrences of “praise” are found in the first six verses, referring to praises coming from the heavens, while only one praise is called forth in verses 7-10 from the earth. If any psalm celebrates the glory and the grandeur of the Lord and worshipping Him, this psalm is it. This psalm in verses 1-6 calls on the galaxies, the universe, the sun, moon and stars, the planets, all outer space, and God adds to the list in the heavens, all his angels and all the angelic hosts of heaven-v. 2. How can we ever trivialize praise and worship when God is calling the troposphere, the first layer of air above the surface of the earth that contains half of the Earth's atmosphere. Weather occurs in this layer—and that’s the picture in v. 4 called “the waters above the heavens.” Many jet aircrafts fly in the stratosphere because it is very stable. The stratosphere is the second layer of Earth's atmosphere. The stratosphere is the second layer, as one moves upward from the Earth's surface. Then there is the mesosphere, and then the thermosphere, and the rest of the heavens, the “highest heavens” –v. 4 is what we often call outer space. God commands all the heavens to praise Him, including all the angelic hosts, the sun, the moon, and the shining stars.

Why? It’s found in verses 5-6—It’s all because God did it. He made them with His command, and they were there. He established them forever and ever. He gave a decree, and that decree will not pass away. Why should the heavens praise the Lord? The reason is because He made them and gave them the awesome privilege of serving Him and His people, and by their reflected glory from their Creator, to bring glory to the Lord. Then in verses 7-10, the psalmist calls the earth to join the heavens. This psalmist picks out the great sea creatures or monsters, and all the ocean deeps or depths. He calls on fire, hail, snow, mist, and stormy wind to fulfill His word and command to praise Him. The psalmist calls for the mountains and the hills, the fruit trees and all cedars, beasts and all livestock, and creeping things and all birds. So how does a fruit tree praise the Lord or how does snow or a sea monster do it? A pastor’s wife, Chansin Esparza, in a blog said it this way. “When a fruit tree does what a fruit tree was created to do, it is worship. It must be. Worship is following the design of our Creator, and living and enjoying the beauty of all God desired for us. When the stars shine, and the birds fly – that is only one form of worship and praise creation gives back to God. When the hills are all... hilly they are praising God.” I like Chansin’s words. It makes me think of an old song from a musical I love, “The Sound of Music. Do you remember the words? “The hills are alive with the sound of music. With songs they have sung, for a thousand years. The hills fill my heart with the sound of music My heart wants to sing every song it hears, My heart wants to beat like the wings of the birds that rise from the lake to the trees My heart wants to sigh like a chime that flies

from a church on a breeze To laugh like a brook when it trips and falls over stones on its way To sing through the night like a lark who is learning to pray I go to the hills when my heart is lonely I know I will hear what I've heard before My heart will be blessed with the sound of music And I'll sing once more..." Beloved, every babbling brook, every frosty morning, every tulip breaking the sod in spring, every salmon leaping upstream in its red beauty, every display of the northern lights, every full moon, every Sweetwater County sunset, every 39 degree below zero Friday morning, every visit we have by an angel unawares, yes, all of Creation, heaven and earth is all about fulfilling God's Word and command to praise Him in their Hallelujah Chorus, to join in Creation's Symphonic Praise giving glory to God in the highest. I call us all, first, to join the symphony in praising the singular Creator of heaven and earth. If we won't praise Him, Jesus said, "If we are silent, the rocks will cry out his praise and hosannas. (Luke 19: 40) Secondly,

JOIN THE SYMPHONY IN PRAISING THE SUSTAINING SOVEREIGN ONLY WHOSE MAJESTIC NAME IS EXALTED ABOVE EVERY NAME.

(II.) Notice verses 11-13. "Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and maidens together, old men and children! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted; His majesty is above earth and heaven." Just as creatures in the heavens and on earth and in the sea show praise to God by being what God designed them to be, so we show forth God's praise by being who He created us to be: His redeemed people in relationship with Him—He as our Bridegroom and we as His Bride. A Church that loves and gives and shares the Gospel's good news, by witnessing, is praising the Lord. Every time you live up to your identity in Christ, and to your call from God, you are praising God. I hear many believers say, "I am a Christian and I intend to do whatever God calls me to do." That testimony is wonderful as we praise our sustaining Sovereign who has the right to command our lives. He alone does. Notice verse 13—"Let them praise the Name of the Lord **for His Name alone** is exalted." Now suppose today God prompts you to serve Him in a way you balk at—to serve Him in a way you choose to reject. Guess what happens. What happens is about the same as a quarterback telling you to run towards the right for ten yards and then cut back left to middle for a pass. Suppose you run straight for the end zone, who is your team's quarterback? Listen to what God is saying—His Name alone is to be exalted. When our conduct conflicts with our confession, then, our confession is clouded, by our conduct. We aren't practicing our profession and confession at all. I ask us today—could God well say to us, "Change your conduct or change your name."?

Are there conflicting banners that wave over your life that demand sovereignty over you? One pastor, Garibaldi McFlurry, spoke of being in Times Square in New

York recently. He spoke of all the buildings with ads hanging on them. He said, “All the big brands were there: Coke, McDonalds, Gap, and each one he said, is fighting to be seen, to have the brightest and biggest and best advertisement.” We’ve all seen the same in Salt Lake City, Chicago, Minneapolis, Detroit, Los Angeles, Denver or Dallas. In the universe, our Lord Jesus Christ, wants His glory and splendor and His sustaining sovereignty to fill the heavens and the earth. In fact, His splendor is above the earth and above the heavens. God made the world to reflect His glory, like the moon reflects the light of the sun. We’re called to praise the only Name—His Name alone. We are called to declare God’s name and glory and character. The sun and moon and stars are doing it; will you and I do it too?

I read this week words from the daughter of a Delta pilot. She wrote: “When I was growing up, I came to understand the concept of sovereignty. In my family, dad was ruler—beyond all kings of the earth and all peoples, above all princes and rulers of the earth. My mom had plenty of authority. But Dad was a force to be reckoned with. My parents believed in biblical discipline. But Dad’s voice, in itself, was enough to humble all of us as children into submission. My father was a Delta pilot, and when he’d be away on a four-day trip and us kids got into trouble, all my mother had to say was, “Don’t make me tell your father about this!” and we’d beg Mom, “Please, please don’t tell him!!” Thankfully, my dad has an extremely gentle side. He is loving so we never questioned his affection for us, but there also was never a question as to who was sovereign in our house.

Beloved, is there ever a question as to whether the Lord is sovereign in our lives? Notice the psalmist starts with kings of the earth, princes, and all rulers whom God calls to praise Him. They were the first people listed among human beings that are commanded to praise God. Those whom we recognize as sovereign--they are to acknowledge the ultimate sovereignty of God—be it our outgoing President Barack Obama or our newly inaugurated President Elect come this Friday. Men and women, young and old. The psalmist uses gender-inclusive and age-inclusive words. No one is exempt—young men or maidens, old men, or children. Alexander Maclaren says in his commentary, “The young man’s strong bass, the maiden’s clear alto, the old man’s quavering notes, and the child’s fresh treble, should blend in the song of praise to God.” God wants His Sustaining Sovereignty, His Name and His Majesty to be above all earth and heaven. It’s not the Chicago Cubs, the Green Bay Packers, the Pittsburg Steelers, the Wyoming Cowboys, the Rock Spring’s Tigers, the Green River Wolves, the Denver Broncos or the Cleveland Cavaliers. Jesus wants to be # 1 alone. No one is exempt from paying homage, praise and worship to the Lamb of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. One day soon, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Every time I hear Revelation 5: 13 being sung, I get spiritual

and physical goose-bumps. “To Him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb, (2x) be blessing and honor and glory and power forever. (2x) Thirdly and lastly,

JOIN THE SYMPHONY IN PRAISING OUR SPOUSAL PROTECTOR FOR WE ARE NEAR TO HIM AS HIS BRIDE. (III.) Notice verse 14. “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!” For this psalmist, this was the Jewish symbol of a king’s power, strength, and victory. To raise up a horn means to protect and bring deliverance. God rescues His people who are near to him—oh what love! He rescued us by dying for us. God singled out Israel to be His chosen people. After the incarnation, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord has extended the boundary lines of who is included in His people. Galatians 3: 25-29 says, “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs, according to-promise.” Every born-again believer is close to God’s heart—we are the Bride of Christ. It is because of God’s protective love for His Bride that Jesus came to earth. The horn has been raised. That’s why we worship. Zechariah prophesied in Luke so we may call this “horn” raised up for our protection, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice Luke 1: 68-71 which declares, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.” Psalm 148 is a foreshadowing of our coming Messiah as the final King who would raise up a horn for His people, who would be raised up as victorious. He is the One Who make the rest of Psalm 148: 14 possible--that God would draw a people near to Himself, His Bride, and that God would save and protect and redeem a people for Himself. This gives us the greatest cause for praise in all the world. As the Psalm closes, the word Hallelujah appears again. “Praise the Lord!” It appears in the New Testament in only one chapter: Revelation 19:1-8. John saw a vision of the last days and wrote, “I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.” Beloved, we should never hear a horn off in the distance blowing welling up with tears or bursting into tears. Why? Because every time we hear a horn in the distance, it should reawaken the memory of our salvation and the memory of the One who died for us at Calvary. Notice v. 14, God has raised up also praise for all His saints, His Bride. Join with me in the symphony and praise the Lord. Amen.