

Psalm 135 “Your Name Endures Forever”

November 25, 2018

Psalm 135

1 Corinthians 8

I said last week that there are some Psalms that serve as cornerstones – songs that summarize a whole section of the Psalter.

Psalm 135 is also such a song!

It’s a lot like Psalm 118 –

and just as Psalm 118 summed up the first part of Book 5,

so now Psalm 135 sets up the last part of Book 5.

I’ve already preached through the “innards” of Book 5 –

I usually cover a whole Psalm in one sermon –

but for Psalm 119 it took eleven sermons!

Psalm 119 has 22 stanzas – each stanza has 8 verses –

and in each stanza,

every verse begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

David Powlison suggests that this is what should come to your mind when you hear Psalm 119:

“Psalm 119 is where I go to learn how to open my heart about what matters,
to the person I most trust.

I affirm what I most deeply love.

I express pure delight.

I lay my sufferings and uncertainties on the table.

I cry out in need and shout for joy.

I hear how to be forthright without self-righteousness.

I hear how to be weak without self-pity.

I learn how true honesty talks with God:

fresh, personal, and direct;

never formulaic, abstract, or vague.

I hear firsthand how Truth and honesty meet and talk it over.

This Truth is never denatured, rigid or inhuman.

This honesty never whines, boasts, rages, or gets defensive.

I leave the conversation nourished by the sweetest hope imaginable.

I hear how to give full expression to what it means to be human,

in honest relationship with the Person who made humanness in his image.”

(David Powlison, Speaking Truth in Love, p11)

We’ll be singing through Psalm 119 in a couple weeks

in our Psalter sing-through on Sunday evenings.

I highly recommend it!

I have also preached through the Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134).

These are pilgrim songs – songs to be sung by those who are on the journey to Zion.

Many of the same themes circle round in these Psalms:
pilgrims and exiles longing for Jerusalem –
longing for deliverance –
longing for the day to come when God will make all things right.

Psalm 135 then brings us back to the themes that we have seen in part 1 of Book 5 –
reminding us of the LORD's mighty deeds of creation –
and his mighty deeds of *new creation* –
the redemption from Egypt and the Conquest.

This is why Psalters for over a hundred years have paired Psalm 135
with Haydn's tune "Creation."

Sing Psalm 135
Read 1 Corinthians 8

How should we think about the gods of the nations?

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul deals with the gods of the nations very much like Psalm 135.
Paul grants that there are many "gods" and many "lords" –
but denies that these gods and lords are in any sense equal to the one true God,
and the one true Lord.

I should mention that in verse 4, when it says, "an idol has no real existence,"
that is translating the phrase, "an idol is nothing in the world."
Paul is not saying that the gods of the nations don't really exist.
Rather, he is saying that the gods of the nations are demons – evil spirits.
(1 Cor 10:20 – "what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.")

Now, when you think of demons, you probably think of the popular imagery of horrific evil.
But that is not the way that the Bible ordinarily portrays demons.
If you could meet a demon and have a conversation, what would it be like?

Rather than rely on modern pop Christianity,
why not go with the way that they are portrayed by their worshipers?!

I would suggest that the ancient mythologies are probably pretty accurate in some ways.
They depict powerful beings who are trying – in flawed ways –
to make the world "a better place" – without reference to God.

But of course, what winds up happening, is that their efforts backfire –
because they have refused to serve and worship the true God.

My hunch is that demons do not *think of themselves* as being evil.
They think that they have a better idea than God of how to run the world,
and while they probably know that God's verdict is against them –

they may very well be self-deceived into thinking that they know better than God!

In other words, if you just think of demons in terms of “diabolical” evil,
then you will overlook most of the demonic in everyday life!
If you think about it, *any* way of life – *any* form of thought –
that encourages you to live life without reference to God
is demonic.

After all, think about how Paul says it in verse 5-6:

“For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth –
as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’ –
yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist,
and one Lord, Jesus Christ,
through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”

Think about that!

From whom are all things – and *for whom* we exist.
If your life is not being lived *for God* –
then you are not living your life the way it was intended to be!

We were created for *him* –
and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him!

And that is the heart of Psalm 135.

1. Hallelujah! Praise the LORD! (v1-2)

Praise the LORD!

Praise the name of the LORD,

give praise, O servants of the LORD,

²*who stand in the house of the LORD,*

in the courts of the house of our God!

Psalm 135 is addressed to those “who stand in the house of the LORD,
in the courts of the house of our God.”

In other words, Psalm 135 is addressed to those who have come to worship God.

Some Psalms – like Psalm 117, that we sang earlier –
are addressed to the nations,

calling on them to praise the God of Israel.

But many Psalms, like Psalm 135,

assume a context of those who already worship the LORD.

This reminds us that the context of public worship is primarily for those who already believe.

The mission of the church is to bring the good news of the gospel to the nations.

The mission of the church is to *make disciples* of the nations.

But the *outreach* of the church is found in our neighborhoods,

our workplaces, our community events.
The *worship* of the church is where we gather with our Triune God.

And that is why I've titled this sermon, "Your *Name* Endures Forever,"
Psalm 135 is all about the *name* of Yahweh.

Verse 1 – "Praise the *name* of Yahweh"

Verse 3 – "sing to his *name*..."

Verse 13 – "Your *name*, Yahweh, endures forever..."

And for that matter, the name of Yahweh is used 18 times in 21 verses!

And in the NT, this emphasis on God's *name* is also found in the Great Commission,
where Jesus says that we should baptize
in the *name* (singular) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
God's *name* has been placed upon you in your baptism.
You have been baptized *into Christ*,
united with him in his death,
so that you might be united with him in his resurrection.

The central verses of the Psalm focus on *why* we praise the LORD.

2. Why Do We Praise the LORD? (v3-18)

a. Because He Is Good to Israel (v3-4)

³ Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good;
sing to his name, for it is pleasant!^[a]

⁴ For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself,
Israel as his own possession.

And first, praise the LORD *for the LORD is good*.

We *sing to his name*, because it is lovely –

the translation "pleasant" might make you think that it is *pleasant* to sing.

Well, it may be pleasant to sing – but that's not the point here!

The point is that the LORD's name is lovely.

The LORD is good.

The name of the LORD is lovely.

And that's not just an abstract point –

the point is that God himself is *present* with his people.

For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel as his own possession –
as his *treasure*!

God *values* you.

You are precious to him.

And so we praise him because he is good and his name is lovely!

And this gets fleshed out in detail in the second point –
stated in verse 5:

b. Because He Is Above All Gods (v5-14)

⁵ *For I know that the LORD is great,
and that our Lord is above all gods.*

Notice that the *second* Lord is not in all caps –
this is “Adonai” – not “Yahweh” –
Yahweh is the *name* of God.
Adonai is one of his titles – “Lord” or “Master.”

Many gods went by the title “Adonai” –
That’s why the Psalmist says “*our* Lord” is above all gods.

But if you would see the greatness of our God – if you would see how Yahweh is *great*,
then you need to see his mighty deeds in history:

i. Because He Does Whatever He Pleases in All Creation (v6-7)

⁶ *Whatever the LORD pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.*
⁷ *He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,
who makes lightnings for the rain
and brings forth the wind from his storehouses.*

First, in verses 6-7 you see the mighty deeds of God in all creation.
Whatever the LORD pleases, he does –
whether in heaven or on earth – in the seas and all deeps.

He governs all creation –
as our Shorter Catechism puts it,
“God’s works of providence are his most holy wise and powerful
preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.”

Clouds, lightning, rain, wind –
all submit to his government.

Now, it’s true that there is a pattern – an order – to God’s ordinary providence.
It is rather predictable!
If you build a house in a flood plain,
it will fill with water during a flood!
If you build a town in a forest,
it will burn down in a forest fire!

There is a certain hubris in modern America.
We think that we can *control* nature.
Stewardship is not the same thing as *control*.

We can shepherd and guide –
but we cannot *control*.
Those of you who have worked with horses
know how much they have a mind of their own.
You can persuade them to do what you want –
but it requires a lot of training to build trust.

I would suggest to you that the image of stewardship
is a good one for thinking about *God's* rule over all things.
If *we* are to reflect the image of God in the way that we exercise dominion over creation,
then it would follow that God's own dominion is exercised in a similar way!

God does not force creation to do what he wants!
He shepherds and guides –
he plants and waters –

he preserves and governs all his creatures and all their actions.

The last line – “who brings forth the wind from his storehouses” – is delightful!
The image is of a farmer who has a storehouse of all sorts of goods.
“I think we need some wind right now!
Let's see, shall we bring the east wind – the hot, dry wind off the desert,
Or the west wind – a moist wind off the Mediterranean!”

In a very real way, science is the study of God's providence in creation.
What are the ordinary patterns in nature?

Some have tried to argue that science proves that there are no miracles –
since you cannot find scientific evidence *for* miracles!
C. S. Lewis, in his book on *Miracles*,
responds that the miracle is actually designed to fit into the “natural.”

When Jesus fed the 5,000 –
it would appear that the five loaves of bread
just kept multiplying as Jesus broke them.
But as soon as it appeared,
each piece of bread would have looked just like the one before!
No sooner did it come into existence than it looked it had always been there –
and been made from the same flour as the rest!

It wasn't *magical* bread – it was ordinary bread!

Or, for instance, take the signs and wonders in Egypt (verses 8-9).

In the Exodus account, it is clear that God used lots of natural means to accomplish the plagues.

Some of them (the frogs, the flies, the locust) could well have been connected.

But even those that weren't (the prime example being the death of the firstborn) would have looked to the observer like a remarkable coincidence, with observable symptoms and effects.

ii. Because It Has Pleas'd Him to Save His People from Egypt (v8-9)

⁸ *He it was who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,*

both of man and of beast;

⁹ *who in your midst, O Egypt,*

sent signs and wonders

against Pharaoh and all his servants;

Psalm 135 reminds us that the Exodus was a reason for Israel to praise the LORD!

Israel is my son, my firstborn, says the LORD –

therefore say to Pharaoh, let my son go!

If you do not let my son go, then I will kill your son – your firstborn!

Now the Psalmist turns and addresses Egypt –

“who in your midst, O Egypt,

sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants.”

The servants of the LORD are called to praise the LORD –

now, what should the servants of Pharaoh do?

Psalm 105 had said that “Egypt was glad when they departed” –

while God's mighty deeds are *for Israel* – for the salvation of his people –

the lesson for the nations is to repent and believe in Israel's God!

Verses 10-12 then go on to speak of the Conquest of the Promised Land:

iii. And Give Them an Inheritance (v10-12)

¹⁰ *who struck down many nations*

and killed mighty kings,

¹¹ *Sihon, king of the Amorites,*

and Og, king of Bashan,

and all the kingdoms of Canaan,

¹² *and gave their land as a heritage,*

a heritage to his people Israel.

The root idea is still back in verse 6:

“Whatever the LORD pleases, he does...”

The prophets make it clear that the LORD governs all nations.
He orders the times and seasons for every nation under heaven.
It is interesting to note that in the 19th century Americans often used this
as an indication of God's favor upon the United States.
The idea of "Manifest Destiny" –
that God had given the United States an important mission in world history –
and that included extending the borders of the U.S. to the Pacific Ocean –
(and some said all of North America!).

But the same logic applies to Russia, England, Saudi Arabia, China.
Empires rise and empires fall.

All the kingdoms of Canaan had been established by God.
But when the time came for their destruction,
God sent his son, Israel, to bring judgment against them!
The Conquest of the Promised Land in the book of Joshua
is very much a sort of "last days" final judgment on the Canaanites.
God was showing us – through Israel –
what his Son will do at the final day,
when he comes to judge the living and the dead.

And that eschatological point – that "last days" point –
is echoed here in verses 13-14:

iv. Because He Will Vindicate His People (v13-14)

¹³ *Your name, O LORD, endures forever,
your renown,^[b] O LORD, throughout all ages.*

¹⁴ *For the LORD will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants.*

The name of the LORD – the name of Yahweh – endures forever,
because the LORD will vindicate his people.
The renown – the remembrance of the LORD – endures throughout all ages
because the LORD will have compassion on his servants.

The name of Yahweh was particularly revealed at explained in the Exodus.
People had used it before –
you find Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob using it in the book of Genesis –
but you don't really understand who God *is*
until God actually *does* what he promises!

The *name* Yahweh means "I am who I am" (or "I will be who I will be") –
but you only really understand what that means
when you see him act in history to redeem his people from slavery in Egypt.

You only see his power and his faithfulness

when you see him bring his people into the Promised Land –
bringing judgment on the nations for their rebellion,
and showing mercy to his people,
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

But the name of the LORD endures forever.

His renown – his fame – his remembrance – endures throughout all ages!

Indeed, you see this in our baptism –

as we are baptized into the *name* of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In baptism God places his name upon his –

so that we might be joined to his possession – to his chosen people.

And the LORD has promised that he will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants.

Pharaoh's servants have received judgment –

but the servants of the LORD receive his compassion and favor!

His judgment and his mercy will work together for the sake of his people.

And all of this is in contrast to the gods of the nations!

Verse 5 had opened this section with a statement of how the LORD is great –
and above all gods.

Now we hear *how much greater!*

c. And the Idols of the Nations Are Not Like Him (v15-18)

¹⁵ *The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.*

¹⁶ *They have mouths, but do not speak;
they have eyes, but do not see;*

¹⁷ *they have ears, but do not hear,
nor is there any breath in their mouths.*

¹⁸ *Those who make them become like them,
so do all who trust in them.*

This is a slightly condensed version of the parallel passage in Psalm 115.

The idols of the nations are silver and gold – the work of human hands.

As we saw a few weeks ago,

the reason why we are not to make any graven images
is because God already *has* an image!

He created *man*, male and female, after his own image.

God's image has a mouth – *and speaks*;

God's image has eyes, *and sees*;

God's image has ears, *and hears* –
because God's image is *like* God.

Our God is a God who sees, hears, and speaks –
so also does his image!

And the gods of the nations are also like *their* images!
Their images have mouths, eyes, and ears –
but they do not speak, see, or hear!

These are man-made gods.
But God made man, male and female, after his own image.

In Psalm 115, the final picture was “they do not make a sound in their throat.”
Here, in Psalm 135, the final picture is “nor is there any breath in their mouths.”

The focus in Psalm 115 was on *speech*.
The focus here is on *breath*.

Does God really have *breath*?
When we say he has eyes, we mean that he sees *truly* –
he sees *all things*.
He gave us eyes so that we might see *some things* –
as the image of the One who sees all things.

But the Hebrew word for breath is *ruach* –
which is often translated “Spirit.”
The Spirit of God is the “Ruach” of God – the “breath” of God!

In verse 7, the LORD brings forth the wind (*ruach*) from his storehouses.
Now here in verse 17, the idols of the nations have no *ruach* in their mouths.

Remember what I just said:
in Psalm 115 the focus was on speech –
in Psalm 135 the focus is on breath.
This was no accident!
The Triune God, who later would be revealed as Father, Word, and Spirit –
gave us many clues throughout the Old Testament!

The God who governs the wind is the God who put “wind” (breath) in our mouths.
In contrast, the gods of the nations are *breathless* – windless – spirit-less –
and those who make them become like them,
so do all who trust in them!

What was implicit in Psalm 115 becomes explicit here:
those who trust in gods who cannot see, hear, or speak
will become like them.

Those who trust in gods who have no breath
soon will have no breath themselves!

Idolatry leads to the grave.

If the thing that you trust has no life –
then you will soon be just like it!

3. Therefore Bless the LORD (v19-21)

¹⁹ *O house of Israel, bless the LORD!*

O house of Aaron, bless the LORD!

²⁰ *O house of Levi, bless the LORD!*

You who fear the LORD, bless the LORD!

²¹ *Blessed be the LORD from Zion,*

he who dwells in Jerusalem!

Praise the LORD!

Now, Psalm 115 then went on to call Israel to *trust* in the LORD.

Here, Psalm 135 will go on to call Israel to *bless* the LORD.

What is the difference?

Psalm 135 is taking these themes from the Hallelujah Psalms (Psalms 111-117),
and blends them together with a focus on Zion
from the Psalms of Ascents.

Not surprisingly, for a series of songs focusing on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem,
the Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134) have a strong focus on Zion – Jerusalem –
the city of God.

The result of this blend is a very different focus for Psalm 135.

The Hallelujah songs of Psalms 111-117

were very much the hallelujah's of a people in exile
(or at least, who *felt* like they were still in exile!).

Psalm 135 has a much more confident tone.

Sure, there is still more to come –

“the LORD *will vindicate his people*
and have compassion on his servants” (v14),

but whereas Psalm 115 had said “trust” the LORD,

Psalm 135 says “bless” the LORD.

Yes, you should do both!

But all of the edits in Psalm 135

move us in the direction of confidence and assurance!

And the song ends where it began –

with the servants of the LORD who stand in the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.

The house of Israel, the house of Aaron, the house of Levi, and indeed, all who fear the LORD

now bless the LORD.

We bless the LORD and praise his holy name because of his mighty deeds in history.

Our song of response is a good example

of how Psalm 135 gets translated into a NT context.

The text is drawn from Melito of Sardis' Easter sermon, "On the Passover."

At the conclusion of the sermon, Melito waxes eloquent

as he proclaims the mighty deeds that Jesus wrought in his death and resurrection,

so Andrew Deliyannides has written a tune that captures beautifully

the crescendo of praise that Melito ends with!

I want you to listen to the conclusion of Melito's sermon –

because you will hear how Melito takes themes from Psalm 135 (Exodus themes)

and weaves them together in the story of Jesus:

94. Pay attention, all families of the nations, and observe! An extraordinary murder has taken place in the center of Jerusalem, in the city devoted to God's law, in the city of the Hebrews, in the city of the prophets, in the city thought of as just. And who has been murdered?...

95. ... Who was he? It is painful to tell, but it is more dreadful not to tell. Therefore, hear and tremble because of him for whom the earth trembled.

96. The one who hung the earth in space, is himself hanged; the one who fixed the heavens in place, is himself impaled; the one who firmly fixed all things, is himself firmly fixed to the tree. The Lord is insulted, God has been murdered, the King of Israel has been destroyed by the right hand of Israel...

98. Yes, even though the people did not tremble, the earth trembled instead; although the people were not afraid, the heavens grew frightened; although the people did not tear their garments, the angels tore theirs; although the people did not lament, the Lord thundered from heaven, and the most high uttered his voice.

99. Why was it like this, O Israel? You did not tremble for the Lord. You did not fear for the Lord. You did not lament for the Lord, yet you lamented for your firstborn [in Egypt]. You did not tear your garments at the crucifixion of the Lord, yet you tore your garments for your own who were murdered. You forsook the Lord; you were not found by him. You dashed the Lord to the ground; you, too, were dashed to the ground, and lie quite dead.

100. But he arose from the dead and mounted up to the heights of heaven. When the Lord had clothed himself with humanity, and had suffered for the sake of the sufferer, and had been bound for the sake of the imprisoned, and had been judged for the sake of the condemned, and buried for the sake of the one who was buried,

101. he rose up from the dead, and cried aloud with this voice: Who is he who contends with me? Let him stand in opposition to me. I set the condemned man free; I gave the dead man life; I raised up the one who had been entombed.

102. Who is my opponent? I, he says, am the Christ. I am the one who destroyed death, and triumphed over the enemy, and trampled Hades under foot, and bound the strong one, and carried off man to the heights of heaven, I, he says, am the Christ.

103. Therefore, come, all families of men, you who have been befouled with sins, and receive forgiveness for your sins. I am your forgiveness, I am the passover of your salvation, I am the lamb which was sacrificed for you, I am your ransom, I am your light, I am your saviour, I am your resurrection, I am your king, I am leading you up to the heights of heaven, I will show you the eternal Father, I will raise you up by my right hand.

104. This is the one who made the heavens and the earth, and who in the beginning created man, who was proclaimed through the law and prophets, who became man by the virgin, who was hanged upon a tree, who was buried in the earth, who was resurrected from the dead, and who ascended to the heights of heaven, who sits at the right hand of the Father, who has authority to judge and to save everything, through whom the Father created everything from the beginning of the world to the end of the age.

105. This is the alpha and the omega. This is the beginning and the end—an indescribable beginning and an incomprehensible end. This is the Christ. This is the king. This is Jesus. This is the general. This is the Lord. This is the one who rose up from the dead. This is the one who sits at the right hand of the Father. He bears the Father and is borne by the Father, to whom be the glory and the power forever. Amen.