

Celebrating

8 of 8 in the Series: Songs of the Spirit | Psalms for the Seasons of Life

9.1.13

Rev. T.J. Campo

Psalm 147:1,10-12, 19ff; Psalm 148; Ephesians 1.4b-6

Psalm 147 Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is becoming... ¹⁰He does not delight in the strength of the horse; He does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. ¹¹The LORD favors those who fear Him, Those who wait for His lovingkindness. ¹²Praise the LORD, O Jerusalem! Praise your God, O Zion!.. ¹⁹ He declares His words to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. ²⁰He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His ordinances, they have not known them. Praise the LORD!

Psalm 148 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! ³Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light! ⁴ Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens! ⁵Let 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; ⁸Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word; ⁹ Mountains and all hills; Fruit trees and all cedars; ¹⁰Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and winged fowl; ¹¹ Kings of the earth and all peoples; Princes and all judges of the earth; ¹²Both 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, Praise for all His godly ones; Even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the LORD!

Ephesians 1 In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Today is the last sermon in a series on The Book of Psalms. I think it's all available online (thanks to the excellent work of Dwight and David and our audio team! Thanks guys!) We've seen in the Psalms these themes that come up again and again – like God has recorded for all time these recurring moods in the spiritual life. We start out LONGING for something outside of this world – we get convinced that there must be more to this “life under the sun” than just work – rest – work – rest ...And we get hungry to know our purpose...to know God.

There are seasons of WAITING...of TREMBLING ... of DESPAIRING... of RESTING and of CONVERSING and we return to these rhythms of the inner life repeatedly as we walk with the God of Grace. It's not that these are the only rhythms and not that they're steps on a ladder to God but that we DO SEEM TO SHARE these seasons...and THE PSALMS do give voice to them. The Old

Testament Church experienced these patterns and we do too. And ultimately, we've seen week by week they all point in one way or another to the Messiah – Jesus Christ who fulfilled these facets of the spiritual life in our place.

Today we end the series the way the Psalms end and that is with CELEBRATING. The last five Psalms all begin and end with the same Hebrew words that are often transliterated into English as “Hallelujah” and means simply “Praise YHWH” or “Praise the LORD”.

The spiritual rhythm of CELEBRATING... or boasting in God, the call and the command to praise God: how are we to think about this and how to practice it, that's our concern today. 1)The DEMAND for Celebration 2) The DRIVER of Celebration 3) The DELIGHT of Celebration

Cultural anthropologists tell us that every society and people group and tribe and nationality of human beings celebrates. You may know that people in hiding e.g. The Diary of Anne Frank sometimes will be discovered because they risk having a celebration and they are overheard. The point being: we have to celebrate. If we stop celebrating we lose our humanity, so people are willing to risk their lives in order to celebrate.

From an anthropological perspective, there have been some interesting studies about spectator sports and celebration. Watching sports can take on a religious significance and CAN be a kind of a substitute for religious celebration (sorry to tell you that right on the cusp of Football Season).

And the God of the Bible is apparently not surprised by the anthropologist's findings. He not only wove that IMPULSE INTO our human nature... He not only gave us the desire to celebrate but also gave His people plenty of outlets for the exercise of the impulse.

So, if you read through the OT trying to identify all the different feasts and celebrations and holy days of remembrance, I think you'd be surprised at how much time and money and effort the OT people were supposed to invest in celebrating...and in addition to all the BIG feasts there was that weekly celebration called the Sabbath. So God created us to celebrate and commanded His people to do it... a lot!

And THAT'S where we start to get a little bogged down because... how can you command someone to celebrate? Can a parent demand that her child be happy? We can tell people to smile for a photo but that's just the look of happiness...but is the feeling of happiness something can you command?

And then add to this complication the fact that the very essence of OT celebration is the worship of God and He is commanding that we ...praise Him.

Does that bother you: that God would demand that we admire Him... that we brag about Him... that we somehow tell Him and tell others how great HE IS?

Has that question ever occurred to you as you read the Bible and especially The Book of Psalms?...Now, if you're like me...when this "problem" presents itself to your mind...you somehow KNOW you shouldn't be thinking this way and you may try to quickly banish this thought from your mind.

At some level I do KNOW that God is not like that Star Trek episode where they meet this deity on some distant planet and he turns out to NEED worship and if he doesn't get it he starts to shrink and become puny and pitiful.

At some level I know that what would be a sin in people must be the opposite in God, i.e. if a friend demanded that I admire him and tell him how great he is ...that would be bad... But it must be different in God...the call to worship...the demand to celebrate God can NOT be motivated by some insecurity in God and MUST be a GOOD THING for us... not something He needs.

And, we DO get a clue about that right here where it says that God "takes no delight in the strength of the horse or the legs of a man" (extra good news for me... btw!)... But it's saying bluntly, "I don't need anything that you have. There's nothing broken in Me that you could fix. Your strength is no help to Me...there IS no need or insecurity or deficiency or unhappiness in Me at all. I am the One and Only Self-Sufficient Being...all other Being depends totally on Me..." God is the Ground of all being.

So, why then are we commanded over and over to celebrate God and to admire Him who NEEDS no admiration?

C.S. Lewis helped me here. He said (we've talked about it before) that we celebrate stuff all the time. I love my barbershop...you should go there...that was a fantastic pizza...did you hear that new song... were you at the Variety Show (best one we ever had)...we send pictures over our phones and post them on social network sites AS AN EXERCISE in praise.

"And the praise" said Lewis "not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation..." It's not good enough to SEE a beautiful sunrise...it doesn't feel like a complete joy until you praise it or share it with someone else. That's why we want to take a picture of it and share it ...i.e. praise it to someone else.

So...when God says, "I am the Ground of all being and the very essence of all beauty...I am infinite beauty and I want YOU to see it... I want YOU to enter into MY joy...I want to share it with YOU...I want to share...ME with YOU." That's the most generous possible invitation— God wants His own infinite JOY (at seeing ultimate beauty) to be shared with US!

And the thing God most admires about His own beauty (which is INFINITE beauty and the essence of all beauty) the favorite thing God sees when He looks at Himself...is His grace. "Mercy is His darling attribute", said Thomas Watson.

That God made all creation is astounding. But His grace and mercy is even more fascinating (Isa 66.2) – an undiscovered Land of Wonder! There are creatures in the depths of the oceans we haven't even seen – sea monsters, giant squid. There are mountains that make your mouth drop open and stare. There are birds and animals and storms and fire and hail and stars and nebulae that we can't even fathom.

There are people...royalty and governments and secrets that affect millions of people at the highest levels of power...and it all depends on God.

But of it all... the fact that God stepped into time and space and called Abraham...and Isaac and Jacob (147.19) and said, "through YOU I will reveal Myself to the world. I will fix the silent planet and give grace to fallen humanity. I will reclaim the world and make it all perfect". The whole universe exists so that God could share this facet of His being and so that WE could be caught up in admiring something so beautiful that to LOOK UPON it will actually make you a better person...would literally change you.

Paul said, "All creation exists as the staging area where God will unveil the beauty of GRACE and all creatures great and small high and low, human and angelic will marvel and praise the glory of His grace.

"In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." (Eph 1.4-6)

It's as if at the end of time, He will hold me up and say, "Here was the rebel...who went against the One who rules the Universe and who wanted to kill God and I LOVED HIM with an everlasting love and I TOOK THE BLAME HE deserved... so that this rebel would become a son...and He sits with Me forever at My table... celebrating!

He is IN THE BELOVED... My everlasting JOY...My perfect reflection...the Son...the Beloved Jesus Christ has taken the place of the rebel...Come Let us celebrate together... let us together admire LOVE...this is My heart... this is beauty itself...let all creation rejoice in the splendor of grace...praise the LORD."

Now...when you begin to see this...not just at the end of time when all creatures great and small will see it... even those who hate it and don't want it... but if you begin to see it now...and are believing it, you will begin NOT SIMPLY TO ASK GOD FOR STUFF – for healing and for help and for daily bread...(which is ok and good to do) but you will begin to praise Him. Celebrating God and His grace will become a delight for you.

This will become more and more beautiful in your eyes and you'll want to sing about it... to muse on it in song. I think it was Martin Luther who said, "Whoever sings prays twice" and your singing about this grace will be a way for you to sort of bask in it and will be a kind of consummation of the

enjoyment of this grace. It's a way to soak in it. You'll find a sense that you're saying to God, "Yes, LORD... I see it! I see the thing that YOU admire...the aspect of Yourself that is the very essence of beauty! I am sharing it with YOU...and YOU are sharing YOURSELF with me..." That's worship. And, just as you want to tell people about this amazing Labor Day Sale... or this new bakery on Las Olas...or the way you want to point to an orchid or a sunrise and say "Wow! Do you see that? Isn't that magnificent?!" IN THE SAME WAY, you'll want to tell others about this Good News...this infinitely beautiful heart of God...who at infinite cost to Himself turns rebels into sons and wants to celebrate with them FOREVER.

As you celebrate this...you'll find that you want to bring God into all the enjoyments of life...Life, as you are celebrating the Gospel...life becomes an ongoing act of fellowship... You get glimpses of what it is to pray without ceasing...and giving thanks in everything.

Our natural tendency to grumble and see flaws and faults and to be bothered becomes drowned out by the "music of the spheres". God has embraced you and you know the sense of relief and purpose. You get glimpses of wanting all creation to worship Him and wanting every creature to "Praise the LORD".