

GREAT PRAISE TO YOU, O LORD

Psalm 135: 1-21 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

It's easy to take pot-shots at the Word of God. This psalm would be an easy target as it doesn't seem to be original—notice I said, “doesn't seem to be.” It is not courageous to study the Bible and come up with attacks and contradictions that you find in it. Attacking the Word of God is rather, a spiritual laziness which denies the unity of Scripture and fails to wrestle with the Biblical text until you find there is unity in the Word, and not contradictions. Psalm 135 is about how God and God alone is truly great! The words of this psalm are not original in the sense of only being found in this psalm. Psalm 135 is amazingly, a masterful composition of fragments of scripture in mosaic style, fused together by an unknown psalmist—and taken in many fragments from 37 of the 150 psalms. Psalm 135 also contains nine fragments from Exodus, three from Numbers, three from Deuteronomy, one from Joshua, two from Job, three from Isaiah, and six from Jeremiah. As we all know, a mosaic is an artistic composition of inlaying small pieces of variously colored glass or stones together to form a design or picture or portrait.

I found a sweet poem this week that captures much of this psalm's mosaic style, and it was written by Frank McEleny. He wrote, “When the wind blows, it blows from heaven and the rain falls down from His fountain; And the lightning comes from the hand of God and His thunder shakes even the mountain. So praise the Lord all ye people; He is the God that created the earth. He created His people to worship Him, not to fall before idols they serve. Will you serve the trees that grow from the earth? Will you bow down and worship the sun? Has gold and silver captured your heart? Will you wander and never return? You were created to worship and walk with the Lord, to walk with Him all of your days; That your heart may be full and your joy complete, and you praise Him in all of your ways.” What a sweet mosaic poem this man wrote to summarize Psalm 135.

Frank McEleny is a poet from Scotland. He writes about himself, saying, “I am from Scotland but have lived in Kansas since 1990. I believe reformation is coming to the Church. I believe it will start in my home country of Scotland, as unlikely as that seems right now. Of course, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” God has laid Scotland on the hearts of Spirit filled believers from all over the world. The time is coming when warriors will arise all over the world. Our weapons will not be the weapons of the world. We will not battle against flesh and blood, but we will be fearless warriors for God. Many times in centuries past Christians in Scotland have stood against authorities, principalities and powers and paid the price with their lives. Yet, what is death to the warrior born of God? He is already dead to this world and alive to the next.”

This poet and his testimony and poem opens the door for me to tell you about a great man of God born in Scotland many years ago on March 19, 1813. Burning within the heart of this great missionary hero, David Livingstone, was a passion to reach people around the world for Christ. David received his medical degree to become a doctor from the University of Glasgow, Scotland. Soon afterward, he joined the London Missionary Society so he could go to southern Africa. His hope and he succeeded, was to open up all of Africa to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The key passage of Scripture burning in Dr. David Livingstone's heart was Psalm 135. He used this psalm to bid farewell to his family and home in Blantyre, Scotland, as he headed out, never to return. Thinking about his dramatic departure from Scotland, his sister wrote these words:

"I remember my father and David talking over the prospects of Christian missions. They agreed that the time would come when rich men and great men would think it an honor to support entire stations of missionaries instead of spending their money on hounds and horses. On the morning of the 17th of November, 1841, we all got up at 5 AM. My mother made coffee. David read Psalm 121 and lastly, he read Psalm 135 and he prayed for us all. My father and David walked to Glasgow to catch the Liverpool steamer for Africa. David never saw our father again." With Psalm 135 ringing in his ears, David Livingstone headed to Africa to spend over three decades serving Christ under the most adverse circumstances. What was it about Psalm 135 that so captivated David's heart for missions? Why did he read this psalm as he left for Africa? What made this sacred song so special for him? What about it inspired him to go to Africa for 32 years and serve there until he died? The answer lies in the fact that this psalm, Psalm 135 is about our great God. It's a psalm that lifts high the name of our great God and calls for praise to be given to Him throughout the world!

Missions exist and missionaries are sent out because in many places in our world, praise and worship to our great God does not exist. Christ's great commission in Matthew 28: 18-20 could be explained with these words. Jesus wanted and we as believers want our great God to be praised tomorrow where He is not confessed or acknowledged today. The theme of this mosaic Psalm 135 cannot be missed. We must give generous, profuse, and continual praise to God because He is Lord over all creation, over all the nations, and He is the Lord and Author of our redemption. Psalm 135 begins with "Praise the Lord!" in verse 1 and it ends in verse 21 with "Praise the Lord!" Every verse in Psalm 135 oozes and echoes with this theme, "Praise the Lord!" This morning let's study this psalm and capture from it--its three greatest themes. What are they?

THE CALL FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO PRAISE AND WORSHIP HIM. (I.)

Notice verses 1-2--the bread of the sandwich as this is an envelope psalm. We

read, “Praise the Lord! Praise the Name of the Lord, give praise, O servants of the Lord, who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God!” This is a psalm for congregations calling us to praise the Lord. When I think of the courts of the Lord, I see this call to praise and worship as God’s summons. The Lord is summoning us all—in fact, the psalmist is summoning everyone in all the world to praise the Lord! And notice, v. 1 that this praise to the Lord centers on the Name of the Lord—“Praise the Name of the Lord!” The mere mention of God or or His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, the mere mention of His name should call us to remembrance and summon us to praise the Lord. This particular call to praise and worship the Lord is specifically a call to do so as servants of the Lord in the house or the courts of the house of our God! Don’t miss that in the face of all the false gods of the pagan nations around this psalmist, he calls God “our God.” Sandwiched in between the two “praise the Lord” call in v. 1, 2 and verses 19-21 is this inspired statement of faith to which we as believers can shout out our “Amen’s” and “Hallelujahs” to, for verses 3-18 are affirmations we all believe today.

Let me summon you as your pastor today—Praise the Lord! But also let me warn you—Praise the Lord. Let this message be to you as a dash light, yes, a red light—saying, “See your service representative immediately.” Let this summons be to you as a conviction to take care of something you may have neglected. My dear pastor friend, Kenneth Meyer, president of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, from which I got my Masters—wrote in small booklet called “Turning Point.” It is a message on confession of sin from Psalm 32. Last week, that was our theme. Ken Meyer wrote. “Some time ago, I was driving on one of our expressways from Chicago to Rockford. About half-way along on my journey, a red light signaled a generator problem. The red warning light flashed on. Trouble. The red light was conviction—the car’s mechanism was warning me. Cruising along, I had three options. I had some electrical tape in the glove compartment. I could cover the light—no red light, no problem-right? Or, I could stop the car, get my hammer out of the trunk and smash the red light. I chose the third option. I got off the road at the next exit and headed for the nearest service station. It was a loose fan belt. I was soon on my way, rejoicing, without a red light.” In our Chevy Pickup, when I start the truck, all the dash lights go on—it shows they work, and then, if all is well, they go off, and I can drive away. Today, in this summons to praise the Lord, it may be what you are doing continually, but if not, I trust it is a dash light in your life saying—“Get this fixed now! Praise and worship the Lord! Theme # 2:

THE CAUSE FOR GOD’S PEOPLE TO PRAISE AND WORSHIP HIM. (II.)

Notice verses 3-18—this is the meat of the sandwich as this is an envelope psalm. Again, notice v. 3 begins again with “Praise the Lord!” Literally, the phrase is **hallel Yah** from which we get our word “hallelujah—praise the Lord. Hallel means make clear, make to shine, boast, give renown to, make a show or brag

about, and celebrate the Lord. Worship is all about praising the Lord. The old English word for worship was worth-ship. It means ascribe to the Lord supreme honor and worth. William Temple spoke words about worship that I can't forget. He said, "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." But why? What's the cause! It's six-fold.

First, *the Lord is good and His name is pleasant.* Verse 3 states it clearly—Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing to His name, for it is pleasant." The Hebrew word is **towb**. It means good in widest sense, sweet, best, pleasing, right, delightful, and lovely. The psalmist also tells us to sing to His Name for it is pleasant. This word for pleasant is **naiym**. It means beautiful, agreeable, sweet, pleasurable, and delightful. The word for the Lord's name is **shem**—pronounced shame. It means a character, name or reputation that is renowned, honored, conspicuous, famous, and authoritative. Give the Lord the reputation He deserves.

Secondly, *the Lord has chosen Jacob/Israel for Himself.* Verse 4 states, "For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel as His own possession." God set this nation apart, and he made us, grafting us into Israel as the Israel of God—Gal. 6:16 which makes us chosen too—elect from every nation. Praise the Lord because of His sovereign grace and choice of us from before the foundation of the earth. Did you realize God's choice of us as believers is because of nothing we have done—that may crush our pride—but it's only by His grace and mercy. We like Israel of old stand in a special position to the Lord—we are the Bride of Christ. We belong to Jesus. We, like Israel, are His prized possession.

Thirdly, *The Lord is great.* Verses 5-7 states, "For I know, (do you know) that the Lord is great, and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. 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. This is so majestic. How great is our God! But I must say—this making of lightning for the rain—I am no meteorologist, but I know rain and lightning often go together—I call those storms electrical storms. But here is where I stop and ponder—"He brings forth the wind from His storehouses." Sometimes I see the clouds are His storehouses. But on Labor Day Sunday night, my wife and were awakened out in the Little Sandy River area in the Wind River foothills. There were no major clouds—many stars, and the wind blew with almost tropical storm strength. I wondered if our little Casita trailer was going to stay upright. We could not see any clouds that were the storehouses for this mighty wind for over an hour. Don't take my word for it—but believe God's word--His wind storehouses are not always visible. How great is our God. Sing with me,

how great is our God. He does what He pleases, even as Daily Bread writer Dave Egner told about a county fair in Michigan where they began an evangelistic service. The grandstands were full, the high school choir filled with Christian young people was in place, but as the first hymn started, a violent storm swept thru the fairgrounds with lightning and thunder roaring. Everyone got up and ran to their vehicles. God rained out the service. For His own reasons, He had different plans. Whether God stops the rain or lets it pour, He is great and in control, and be sure, He knows what is best, even when we would debate it.

Fourthly: *The Lord's works are mighty.* Notice verses 8-12. “He it is who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of beast; who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants; who struck down many nations and killed many mighty kings, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, and the kingdoms of Canaan, and gave their land as a heritage, a heritage to his people Israel.” Don’t ever stop praising the Lord for all His signs, wonders, and clear evidences that leave both His chosen people and those who are God’s enemies filled with shock and awe. God didn’t just get Israel safely out of 400 years of bondage in Egypt. No, He also, in equally wonderful style, ran interference on Israel’s behalf while 3 million+ sons and daughters of Jacob were in their wilderness, desert wanderings for 40 years. King Sihon and King Og were formidable enemies. Then God helped Moses turn the reins over to Joshua and Israel crossed the Jordan into Canaan Land to take over a land full of crops and grapes and vineyards and olive gardens, a land flowing with milk and honey. There were sheep and goats and cattle there and bee hives overflowing with honey. When God decides to give us what He had promised—even as the land of promise to the Jews, He gives extravagantly—God gives a heritage to His people.

Fifthly: *The Lord's Name, renown and character endures forever.* Verses 13-14. “Your Name, O Lord endures forever, Your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages. For the Lord will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants.” What a picture this is that calls for praise. Verses 8-12 were about what God has done in the past, but v. 13-14 are about God’s present and forever future. His name—His **shem**, His character, name and reputation is renowned, honored, conspicuous, famous, and authoritative forever. This is Bible doctrine--God is unchangeable, immutable, unalterable, unvariable—He’s the same, yesterday, today and forever—Hebrews 13: 8. That’s why we can depend on it in v. 14, that the Lord will vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants. Beloved, be certain—none of us know how God is going to exercise His vindicating of us and how He will show compassion. He does what He pleases. Will He answer our prayers for healing, winning, harvesting, and delivering always as we desire? We have no such promise. But here is His promise—He will vindicate (protect and

defend) us and have compassion on His servants—that’s you and me—take it to the bank—count on Him. The last cause for praising the Lord:

Sixthly, He is the only God. Verses 15-18 are powerful. “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them.” William McDowell wrote the words to a song I love and most of you know—“You Are God Alone. His words match verses 15-18. The words sung by Phillips, Craig and Dean are “You're not a God created by human hands; You're not a God dependent on any mortal man. You're not a God in need of anything we can give, By Your plan, that's just the way it is. You are God alone; from before time began, You were on Your throne, You are God alone. And right now, in the good times and bad, You are on Your throne, You are God alone. You're the only God whose power none can contend You're the only God whose Name and Praise will never end. You're the only God who's worthy of everything we can give. You are God, that's just the way it is. You're unchangeable (Unchangeable) Unshakable (Unshakable) Unstoppable (Unstoppable) That's who you are (That's who you are). We’ve looked at the meat of Praise—We praise because—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Lastly, we go from the call to praise and the cause for praise to:

THE CLIMAX FOR GOD’S PEOPLE AS THEY PRAISE AND WORSHIP

THE LORD. (III.) Notice verses 19-21—the bread of the sandwich which holds this envelope psalm together and seals it. Here it is! “O house of Israel, bless the Lord! O house of Aaron, bless the Lord! O house of Levi, bless the Lord! You who fear or reverence the Lord, bless the Lord! Blessed be the Lord from Zion, He who dwells in Jerusalem. Praise the Lord! This final movement of Psalm 135 now comes to its climax and crescendo. The final movement in a symphony calls on many instruments in an orchestra even as the psalmist calls on the house of Israel, the house of Aaron, the house of Levi, and all of us who fear and reverence the Lord to all do the same thing. We are all to bless the Lord. Pastor David Wagner from Erie, Pennsylvania says we are to praise the Lord fervently, continually, publicly, privately, and intelligently. I would add, Bless and praise the Lord softly, loudly, in a whisper, together, alone, in your family, with your spouse, in the front room, in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the family room, in the bathroom, in the basement, in the office, at work, in the car, in the truck, when you’re fishing, when you’re hunting, when you go to bed, when you get up in the morning, when you go for a walk, when you go out to eat, when you wait for your car to have the oil changed, and now you add your times. The words bless in this finale come from the Hebrew word **barak**, which means kneel to bless and adore God. Now, is your dash light in your soul flashing red, or is this your habit? O church, bless the Lord! Praise the Lord. Don’t make the rocks have to cry out. Do it today! Do it now!