

“Nothing prepares the heart more for worship of the Lord than to contemplate his beauty and perfection” (F. Gaebelin). His incomparable greatness/goodness demand our heartfelt worship. Note Psa 135 thesis:

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As the chosen ones, we must praise our incomparable God.

His incomparability celebrated (5-18) between calls to praise (1-4, 19-21).

- I. Opening Call to Praise the Incomparable God of Israel (1-4).
 “Hallelujah” (lit. praise Yah[weh]) brackets the psalm (1, 21).
 - A. Superlative duty: threefold call (1abc). Hebraism for emphasis. No higher calling than this. “God made us to be worshippers. That was the purpose of God in bringing us into the world” (Tozer).
 - B. Selected worshippers: threefold identification (1d, 2). Plurals, “ye,” “servants.” Hist. ref. Levitical priests; by ext. whole church.
 - C. Sensible reasons: threefold rationale (3, 4)—1) His goodness (“the sum total of all perfections” and “the supreme good for His creatures,” Bavinck, RD 2.21), 2) its pleasantness (the aesthetic beauty of music is God’s goodness in creatures; praising God perfects our enjoyment of Him; our enjoyment stirs more praise, WSC #1), 3) His choosing us for His treasure (all of grace, guarantee of our blessedness in fellowship with Him). All should praise God but the Christian has many more weighty reasons to praise Him.
- II. The God of Israel Incomparable (5-18). God is not the greatest in a continuum of beings. He is absolutely unique (Isa 40.18; 46.5). “The creature has what is God’s [imago Dei], and therefore is rightly said to be like God. But it cannot be said in this way that God has what belongs to His creature: wherefore neither is it fitting to say that God is like His creature; as neither do we say that a man is like his portrait, although we declare that his portrait is like him” (Aquinas, SCG 1.29).
 - A. Absolute sovereignty of the God (5-14). Majestic in Himself; King over all creation. This accounts for our election; the psalm focuses on this aspect of God’s goodness.
 - 1) Asserted (5, 6). I praise because “I know the LORD is great” (5a). He is “the first and chiefest being” (1690 BC #1), “a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth” (WSC #4). Though incomparable, 5b asserts His superiority to “all gods,” i.e., all idols worshipped wickedly. Verse 6 is impressively unqualified, revealing the unity of the divine pleasure and the divine act—incomprehensible for us, really. For God, to will and to do is the same thing! Philosophers say rightly that God is “pure act” without “passive potency.” He is “absolutely perfect and the eternally perfect fulfillment of

himself” (Muller, DLGTT). Further, all that He does is one eternal, omnipotent act in Him, the very same as the good pleasure of His will (Isa 46.9, 10; Eph 1.5). Obviously, He cannot be stopped by His creatures from fulfilling His eternal purpose. Also, His act has creaturely effects in time and space, “in heaven, and in earth” (6bc), i.e., in the whole creation.

- 2) Illustrated in creation and redemption (7-12). Creation came into being out of nothing by the mere pleasure of God (Gen 1.1, 3), and it continues to exist by His perpetual, sovereign, active power (true also of Christ, Col 1.16, 17). As He sustains all things, all living things live in Him, all moving things move in Him, and all existing things have our being in Him (Acts 17.28).
 - Sovereignty over nature (7). Implies all ascending vapors are “caused” by Him, and all lightnings, rains, winds, etc. Against Deism and Scientism—popular gods of modernity. “He releases the wind from His vaults” (Tanakh) is a poetic expression and does not negate the reality of “second causes” (2LCF 5.2). Why does wind blow? Gases move from high-pressure areas to low-pressure areas AND God governs this creature of wind and all its actions (“providence”, WSC #11). Also, “God, in his ordinary providence maketh use of means [instruments, second causes], yet is free to work without, above, and against them [means] at his pleasure” (2LCF 5.3). This accounts for real miracles in history.
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- PRAISE THE INCOMPARABLE GOD OF ISRAEL: 2/2 (Psa 135) CBC-25 Sep 2022
- Sovereignty over Egypt (8, 9). From “nature” to human affairs. “Killed all the firstborn of people and animals alike” (alt.), His prerogative (Deut 32.39). Judged sinful Egyptians (hardened Pharaoh, Exod 4.21) and their gods (vv. 15-18; cf. Exod 12.12); saved Israel, just as unworthy (election). “Tokens/miracles” were His self-glorification as Yahweh (Num 14.22) and sovereign mercy to His elect.
 - Sovereignty over the nations (10-12). Emphasizes the greatness of 1) Israel’s enemies, 2) God’s power against enemies/for Israel, 3) God’s generosity toward Israel. These foreshadowed the much greater enemies (Satan)/display of power (spiritual realm)/larger inheritance (eternal life) we have in Christ. “And on that cross Christ freed himself from the power of the spiritual rulers and authorities; he made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession” (Col 2.15, alt.).
 - 3) Consequent glory to God, deliverance of us (13, 14). God’s glory (not our rescue) is the ultimate end for saving us. Thankfully, He glorifies Himself *in* saving us!

[His own glory above all] is certainly what God aims at in the disposition of things in redemption . . . that God should appear full, and man in himself empty, that God should appear all, and man nothing. It is God's declared design that others should not "glory in his presence," which implies that it is his design to advance his own comparative glory (J. Edwards, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence" on 1 Cor 1.29-31; 1731).

B. Obvious inferiority to God of alternative "gods" (15-18). Remember the psalm's central theme: celebrating God's incomparability.

These verses contrast idols with the true God who has no literal physical mouth/eyes/ears, etc., yet He speaks, sees, hears, and is a most pure spirit—the fullness of life in Himself. He also creates/renews us in His own image, that we might speak, see, hear, have spiritual life from Him. Idols/idolaters, the exact opposite, and so vastly inferior to the true and living God.

1) The irony of their inferiority (15-17). "Irony" can mean "a state of affairs or an event that seems deliberately contrary to what one expects and is often amusing as a result." Idols worshipped as gods, yet inferior to their worshippers! That is ironic and would be humorous if it weren't so tragic.

- Made by their worshippers in the the image of their worshippers (15). "Silver and gold" are creaturely substances; "the work of men's hands" imply inferiority to those who worship them.

It is easier for a man to cease to be a man, by worshipping as gods things of his own creation, than it is for things of man's own creation to become gods as a result of his worship. It is more likely that "man who is in a position of honor and who does not realize it" should become "comparable to the beasts" [that perish] (Psa 49.20), than that the work of man's hands should be ranked above a work of God, created in God's image—that is, man himself. So it is just that man should be sundered [cut off] from him who made him, when he puts above himself that which he has created (Augustine, CD VIII.23).

- Dead members: mute mouths, blind eyes, deaf ears, no spirit (16, 17). Seems a deliberate allusion to Deut 4.28 and Deut 29.17, q.v.

2) The imitation of their inferiority (18). Axiom: "We become what we worship" (title of book by G. K. Beale). "Deuteronomy 29.4 [q.v.] is describing idolaters of Israel's first generation becoming like their spiritually inanimate idols" (p. 76). "In fact, the overwhelming OT use of the basic phraseology 'having ears, but not hearing' refers to unrepentant [sinners] who had become as spiritually lifeless as the idols they had insisted on continuing to worship" (p. 253; cf. Isa 6.9, 10). Making and trusting idols instead of God is a mark of the spiritually dead, and being spiritually dead is a judgment for worshipping idols.

"The principle is this: if we worship idols, we will become like the idols, and that likeness will ruin us" (p. 46).

III. Closing Call to Praise the Incomparable God of Israel (19-21)

The initial call to worship (1-4) is substantially repeated at the end of the psalm, a pleasing conclusion. Not only is our incomparable God inherently worthy of our most ardent praises, but (it is implied), praising/worshipping Him in whose image we are made makes us more like Him. Praising God is the most ennobling, humanizing thing we can do. We who are unholy in ourselves are being transformed spiritually to become more and more "godly" (like God) as we worship Him. By His "great and precious promises," we are becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1.4). This spiritual renewal only happens in those who worship the true God, and we do that only through Jesus Christ (Rom 8.29; 2 Cor 3.18; 1 Jn 3.1-3).

- A. Superlative duty: threefold call (19, 20). Very emphatic repetition 3x followed by the fourth.
- B. Selected worshippers: Israel/Aaron/Levi → ye that fear the Lord (19, 20). Again, hist. ref. Levitical priests (vv. 1, 2); but here, even more likely, an extension to the whole church: "ye that fear [i.e., worship] the LORD." Your calling in life, to a large degree, is to join the whole, holy chorus of believers singing God's praises, exalting Him because He is the incomparable God, as this psalm declares.
- C. Spreading testimony (21). "Out of Zion," hist. ref. to the Jerusalem Temple, the symbol of God's dwelling in those days. This earthly spot was ground zero for the ministry of our Lord Jesus and the charge He gave us as His disciples (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1.8). Let the church's "hallelujah" (vv. 1, 21) sound out from us to the furthest reaches of the whole world! Ω