

Summer in the Psalms

Praise Psalms: Psalm 150

1. The where of praise (vs. 1)

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Summer in the Psalms Praise Psalms¹ (Psalm 150)

Today we are concluding our sermon series called "Summer in the Psalms." If you are like most people, you've read a few of the Psalms when you were dealing with a particularly difficult issue, or maybe you passed by them on your way reading through the Bible. But many of us have missed the incredible depth and richness of the Psalms, so we've been spending this summer in this incredible part of the Bible. One thing we've discovered is that the Book of Psalms is designed for this purpose:

Psalms is a book of prayers to help you obey God's Word and stay faithful to Jesus Christ.

I hope it has helped you in that – it certainly has for me. The Psalms have been used in worship through the ages being sung and being recited, and we are going to look at a Psalm about worship today, but the psalms are all actually prayers in order to help us obey God's Word and stay faithful to Jesus Christ.

As we've gone through this, we've discovered that there are different types of Psalms – there are different styles that we recognize and can group them in categories together. Here's the list of all the different styles, and we've spent time this summer looking at all of them.

We began this series talking about the Praise Psalms, and it is appropriate we end with a Praise Psalm, because the book of Psalms itself starts and ends with praise, literally. And no matter what else is going on in the psalms, no matter what style of Psalm it is that you are reading, praising God can be found in and through every single one of them – all 150.

I find it interesting that praise and worship has become something controversial, when it is such a central element in the book of Psalms as well as in the church's relationship with God. From the late 1980's until the early two thousands, many churches were engaged in a "war." Do you know what I'm talking about? They were

¹ **Sources of research:**

- Stephen J. Lennox, *Psalms: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1999)
- W.T. Purkiser, *Beacon Bible Commentary, Volume 3: Job through Song of Solomon* (Kansas City, MO, Beacon Hill Press, 1967)
- Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973)
- Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985)
- John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016)
- W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms* (Old Tappan New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1973)
- John Koessler, *Hallelujah Chorus* (*Preachingtoday.com*, Christianity Today International, 2009)

called “worship wars,” fighting over musical style and what kind of instruments and technology we should use to worship God.

When it comes to Psalm 150, the capstone Psalm in the book, it is impossible to ignore worship, because Psalm 150 is *all* about worship. And not only is it about worship, but it’s about the *music* of worship. This Psalm offers an important reminder that worship is bigger than our personal preferences. So let’s start out by seeing from this Psalm...

1. The *where* of praise (vs. 1)

If you look at this, you’ll notice that the direction of praise is different than we usually think it ought to be. We usually think that worship starts with *us*. Maybe that’s why we have so much conflict about it. We think that worship is personal, that it is an expression of our own personal devotion to God, and so therefore it ought to reflect our own personal preferences and tastes. But this short instruction manual in praise shows that *worship starts with God, not us*. The praise doesn’t start on earth and make its way up to heaven; it begins in God’s sanctuary above the heavens, then it moves from there to the heavens, and from the heavens to earth.

This is the same direction of worship that we see in the book of Revelation. In Revelation 5, John has been caught up into the heavens and sees angels and saints all surrounding God’s throne. Watch the direction of praise:

“In a loud voice they were saying: ‘Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!’ Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” (Revelation 5:12-13, niv)

Did you see it? It starts in heaven and then is taken up by those on earth. That means *our praise needs to align with what’s already going on in heaven*. We are NOT the originators of worship; God’s throne is. We don’t initiate it, so it’s not about our personal preferences.

Let me illustrate it this way; I’m going to pick on some of us a little bit. Some of us have difficulty getting into worship when it starts. What Shelly and I see when we greet you is a much smaller crowd than what I see by the time I get up to preach. When you come in late, don’t you feel a little awkward, stepping into something that’s already been going on? It’s like walking in late to a movie. Well that’s kind of what it’s like every time we come together to worship; we are simply stepping into what’s already been going on – non-stop – around God’s throne in heaven. So it’s imperative that we learn from this Psalm what that kind of praise is and what it ought to be for us, and I think you’ll find it’s not really about our preferences at all.

Let’s make sure we get worship right by seeing the next thing...

2. The *why* of praise (vs. 2)

This Psalm focuses on two reasons to praise God: First the Psalm says we praise God for what he has *done* – the psalmist says, “praise him for his mighty works.” The Psalmist isn’t just talking about God’s miraculous powers; he’s taking about the things God does to save us. We don’t have to think very hard to consider the great things God has done for us through Christ so that we can be saved from sin and in a relationship with God as our loving Father. But then the psalmist also tells us to praise God for *his greatness* – in other words, we praise God for *who he is*; for his nature and character, which if we haven’t learned anything else from the Psalms, it is that God is holy and loving. It is God’s character of holy love that drives him to do what he does for us, so we praise him for both what he does and who he is.

We recognize that praise doesn’t start with us, and that God deserves our praise because of what he does for us and who he is. Then *how* is it that we are supposed to praise him?

3. The *how* of praise (vs. 3-5)

Worship is bigger than our personal preferences because it incorporates all kinds of means. The Psalmist isn’t just making the point that we should worship God; his point is that we should worship God by every means possible! So there are some things that are really clear: we are to worship God with music; we are to be accompanied by music of every musical instrument we have at our disposal, and especially the LOUD instruments! Or more specifically, with the loud, clashing cymbals! I’ve heard from folks who will tolerate the style of worship, even though it’s not their personal preference, but they are less willing to tolerate the volume of worship. Listen, if it were up to me, I’d be worshiping to the hard rock of the seventies, or maybe the funk and R&B of the seventies and eighties, so I don’t mind it being loud – I agree with the Bible: the louder the worship is, the better. And, I might add, that the issue of loudness for some folks is still more often about personal preference than actual volume. I remember when I first got here ten years ago, some of our folks complained about the loudness. But we actually used a decibel meter each Sunday in our worship services to make sure it was below 90 dbs – that’s below the level of OSHA monitoring requirements. The funny thing was though that at that same time we would sometimes have Southern Gospel Quartets come through and do concerts, and so we measured the decibels of their music – it was well *above* 90, pushing 100 dbs – much louder than our worship! But the same folks were singing right along with *that* music, without a complaint in the world!

I think it’s pretty safe to say that if we heard the style of music that the Psalmist was used to 3,000 years ago, we wouldn’t like it very much – no matter how loud or quiet it was! So here’s something we learn from this Psalm: it is NOT biblical for you or me to demand that everyone agree with you or me on our preferences. This psalm calls me to do my best to worship, regardless of the style that’s being used. I need to praise him with instruments I like, and with the ones I don’t like, and admit

that God accepts that praise. ***I don't have to like it, but God says he does!*** So it's not about what I like, rather what God likes.

All of that means that our focus needs to be correct first: that we are focusing on where praise originates and why we do praise. Because God is more interested in the exuberance, the participation, the honesty, and the authenticity of our worship. We are trying to keep up with the worship that happens in Heaven, and according to Isaiah, *that* worship shakes the doorposts of the Temple. The Temple doorposts were huge rock blocks that weighed tons and tons, and heavenly worship is so loud it shakes those! Those are some mighty sub-woofers in heaven!

So can I just say this about the so-called “worship wars” – ***it's not our differences in musical taste that has caused the most damage in churches: it is our attitudes of contempt for different styles.*** It is our lack of respect. Some people sadly disrespect the music of the past, but it's that music that has helped the church get where she is today. Others disrespect the music of today that has allowed new generations to worship. Listen: all of us are going to struggle when it comes to worship styles; we will never be able to please all the people all the time.

So let me quickly explain how we approach worship here at WVC: because of what this Psalm says, we know that for believers in Jesus, it isn't the style that is important; it is our perspective, our participation, and our authenticity. Right? And we can do that in a variety of styles. I am just as deeply moved by an ancient hymn as I am by a new praise song. So you might ask how we pick the music that we do for Sundays? Here's the deal: while we can worship to any style, a non-Christian or new believer is more attuned to their preference. If we attempt to do music in a style that they can connect with, then they will be able to become more attuned to the presence of God. Like Pastor Roger says, the style is an “on-ramp” onto the highway of worship. So we try to be sensitive to the non-believer or new believer among us, while singing the lyrics and melody that the rest of us can connect with. The non-believer doesn't know the difference between a hymn and chorus if it's in a style they can somewhat connect to. But – the way they can *really* have an encounter with God is when they walk into a room singing songs they've never heard before, but in a style that they can connect with, and the mature Christians are focusing on the where and why, not the how. When they sense our authenticity and focus on God, they will sense that God is among us, they will be confronted with his loving presence, and they will want to open their lives to him.

So this is important: **worship is not a performance, it is participation** – worship is US participating with what is already happening around the throne of God. It is not a performance we put on once a week. In fact, for that reason, worship is much, much more than music; worship is a life being lived for God. The Bible says:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1, niv)

And that brings us to the last point...

4. The *who* of praise (vs. 6)

The Psalm says literally, “let all breath praise the Lord.” Pastor and author, Mark Batterson, writes: “You take approximately 23,000 breaths every day, but when was the last time you thanked God for one of them? The process of inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide is a complicated respiratory task that requires physiological precision. We tend to thank God for the things that take our breath away. And that’s fine. But maybe we should thank him for every other breath too!”²

Everything that has breath, praise the Lord. Praise is not just reserved for people; remember when we looked at Psalm 8 earlier in this series? It talks about how *all of creation* praises God.

Friends, all of creation sings God’s praises; not just us.

Mark Batterson, in the same book as I quoted earlier, also wrote this: “Research in the field of bioacoustics has revealed that every day we are surrounded by millions of ultrasonic songs. Did you know, for instance, that the electron shell of the carbon atom produces the same harmonic scale as the Gregorian chant? Or that whale songs can travel thousands of miles underwater? Or that meadowlarks have a range of three hundred notes? Supersensitive sound instruments have discovered that even earthworms make faint staccato sounds! Arnold Summerfield, the German physicist and pianist, observed that a single hydrogen atom, which emits one hundred frequencies, is more musical than a grand piano, which only emits eighty-eight frequencies.

Science writer Lewis Thomas summed it up in this way: ‘If we had better hearing, and could discern the [singing] of sea birds, the rhythmic [drumming] of schools of mollusks, or even the distant harmonics of [flies] hanging over meadows in the sun, the combined sound might lift us off our feet.’”³ We take our place among all of creation that praises the Lord.

This is exactly what John described as he saw our certain future:

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’”
(Revelation 5:13, niv)

One day the worship wars will end. All God’s people, and all of creation, will be united in one great Hallelujah chorus. We will be in the same room with the really loud music that is already being sung now, as saints and angels are singing praise to God, and the rest of creation is echoing their singing. Until then, we the church joins in, as the entire domain of God resounds with praise. All that is left is for *you* to add *your* voice, too. Let everything that has breath, (say it with me, loud voice): PRAISE THE LORD!⁴

² Mark Batterson, *All In* (Zondervan, 2013), page 119

³ Ibid, 118-119

⁴ Koessler

Ephesians 5:18-20 – “Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”