

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

LET HEAVEN AND EARTH PRAISE THE LORD

Psalm 148

By

Steven J. Cole

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Let Heaven and Earth Praise the Lord!
Psalm 148

If you are like me (and I suspect that most of you are), you've got a lot of room to grow in the daily practice of praising the Lord. I hope that our study in the Psalms has fanned the flame of your desire to become a person of praise. A main way to grow in praise is to read and meditate on the Psalms every day.

The psalmist acknowledged (Ps. 71:6), "my praise is continually of You." You would think that continual praise of the Lord would be adequate. But he goes on to say (Ps. 71:14), "But as for me, I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more." If the psalmist needed to resolve to praise the Lord yet more and more, how much more do we!

Maybe you're thinking, "But I don't have a bubbly personality. I'm not the type who goes around saying, 'Praise the Lord' all the time." But praising the Lord doesn't mean repeating, "Praise the Lord," over and over. Rather, praising the Lord is to exult and rejoice in who God is and what He has done, especially, in what He has done to redeem you and draw you near to Him through the cross of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:13).

Genuine praise contains both a rational and an emotional element. With our minds, we must understand who God is, as revealed in His Word. Otherwise, we are not worshiping the true God, or at least, God as He is truly revealed. But, also, when you understand who God is and what He has done in sending His own Son to die for your sins, it affects your heart. It fills you with joy and thankfulness. It humbles you to realize that your sin put Him there. It motivates you to follow Christ and please Him with all your heart. If you can think about what Jesus did on the cross and shrug it off, you're not a Christian!

Psalm 148 is a glorious psalm of praise. It is easy to see that praise is the theme. The command to praise the Lord is repeated nine times in the first five verses and twelve times in the entire

psalm. Barton Bouchier wrote (cited by C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* [Baker], 7:426),

This psalm is neither more nor less than a glorious prophecy of that coming day, when not only shall the knowledge of the Lord be spread over the whole earth, as the waters cover the sea, but from every created object in heaven and in earth, animate and inanimate, from the highest archangel through every grade and phase of being, down to the tiniest atom— young men and maidens, old men and children, and all kings and princes, and judges of the earth shall unite in this millennial anthem to the Redeemer's praise.

The message of Psalm 148 is simple:

Everything and everyone in heaven and on earth should praise the Lord.

The psalm falls into two sections: in verses 1-6 the command is (148:1), "Praise the Lord from the heavens." In verses 7-14, the command is (148:7), "Praise the Lord from the earth." Both main sections follow the same outline. First, there is the *roster* of everything and everyone that should praise the Lord, followed by the *reasons* to praise the Lord. As with each psalm from 146-150, Psalm 148 begins and ends with, "Praise the Lord."

1. Everything and everyone in heaven should praise the Lord (148:1-6).

First (148:1), there is a threefold opening call to praise the Lord from the heavens. "The heights" is a poetic parallel for "the heavens."

- A. The roster of those in heaven that should praise the Lord includes all the angels and all inanimate things in heaven (148:2-4).

- (1) The heavenly roster includes all the angels (148:2).

"Praise Him, all His angels; praise Him, all His hosts!" Sometimes, "hosts" refers to the heavenly bodies, but in this verse, it is probably parallel to "angels." When it refers to the angels, it has the nuance of God's mighty spirit-beings that fight for God against the forces of darkness. We see this in several places in the Old Testament. When the king of Aram was enraged because Elisha the

prophet was revealing his anticipated military movements to the king of Israel, he sent a great army to take Elisha captive. They surrounded the city and when Elisha's servant saw them, he was terrified. But Elisha asked the Lord to open the servant's eyes. We read (2 Kings 6:17), "And the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." These were the heavenly hosts, the angels.

Also, the prophet Daniel suddenly saw what looked like a man, dressed in linen, with a gold belt, whose body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and feet like polished bronze, and his words like the sound of a tumult (Dan. 10:5-6). He told Daniel that he had been sent to respond to his prayers, but had been engaged in battle with the prince of Persia (a demon) for three weeks, until Michael the archangel came to help him (Dan. 10:11-13). The vision left Daniel trembling on his hands and knees, without any strength.

One of the main functions of these impressive angelic beings is to praise the Lord. We might ask (as Calvin does, *Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], on Ps. 148:1, p. 304) how the psalmist, who was not in any sense equal to the holy angels in the duty of praise, could exhort them to praise the Lord? The sense seems to be that he does it to stir himself up to join them in their heavenly chorus. As we know, in heaven we will join with the angels around the throne, singing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain..." (Rev. 5:11-12).

One application is, if you are not learning to praise God here on earth, you're going to feel rather out of place in heaven! Every day, before you leave your house in the morning, make sure that your heart is filled with praises to our glorious God and Savior!

- (2) The heavenly roster includes all the inanimate things in heaven (148:3-4).

"Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all stars of light! Praise Him, highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens!"

"The highest heavens" is literally, "the heaven of heavens," and either refers to the distant galaxies and stars or to the place where God dwells. "The waters that are above the heavens" is probably a reference to Genesis 1:6-7, where God separated the

waters below the expanse from the waters above. It is a poetic way of acknowledging that the sky holds a lot of water, which we know when heavy rains fall.

Here we might ask (and the same question will apply to the inanimate and non-rational things on earth), "How can something inanimate or unthinking praise the Lord?" The psalmist calls on sun, moon, stars, clouds, sea monsters and all creatures of the deeps, fire, hail, snow, mist, stormy winds, mountains, hills, fruit trees, cedars, beasts, cattle, insects, and birds, all to praise the Lord! How can this be? What does he mean?

I think the most obvious meaning is that all of these things call attention to the glory of their Creator, whose infinite understanding (Ps. 147:5) spoke them into existence (Ps. 148:5). As Psalm 19:1 declares, "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands." David wrote that before the telescope was invented. Think of how awestruck he would be if he knew about the millions of galaxies containing trillions of stars that we now know about!

In *The Pleasures of God* (revised & expanded [Multnomah, 2000], p. 93), John Piper cites a November, 1989, newspaper article that reported that two Harvard astronomers had discovered a "Great Wall" of galaxies stretching hundreds of millions of light years across the universe. The wall is supposedly 500 million light years long, 200 million light years wide, and 15 million light years thick. (One light year is a little less than six trillion miles!) This Great Wall consists of more than 15,000 galaxies, each with millions of stars.

But just three months later, in February, 1990, the news reported that astronomers had discovered more than a dozen evenly distributed clumps of galaxies that dwarf the so-called "Great Wall." In fact, the Great Wall was now seen to be merely one of the closest of these clumps or regions that contain very high concentrations of galaxies. The only reason that all astronomers do not immediately fall on their faces and worship the God who spoke these galaxies into existence is that their foolish hearts are darkened because they suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18-22).

James Boice (*Psalms* [Baker], 3:1274) points out two ways that these heavenly bodies are a model for our worship. First, their worship of God is always visible. As Psalm 19:4 says, "Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world." Second, their worship of God is constant. It does not vary. Psalm 148:6 declares, "He has also established them forever and ever." A third reason could be added, that these stars are a model for us in that they always obey God. This is implied in the second line of verse 6, "He has made a decree which will not pass away." The celestial bodies follow the laws of physics that God has established. If only we were so obedient in worship to our Creator!

After giving the heavenly roster that should praise the Lord, the psalmist gives the reason they should praise Him:

- B. The reason that those in heaven should praise the Lord is because He created them and has established them forever (148:5-6).

First, both the angels and the celestial bodies should praise the Lord because He created them (v. 5): "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created." Although many pagans worship both angels and the stars, they sin by so doing, because these are only created things, which should point us to the Almighty Creator. They owe their existence to the command of God, who said, "Let there be..." (Gen. 1:3, 6, 14, etc.). God didn't have to work hard for billions of years to create the universe. Rather, He spoke and by His infinite power, the universe came into being (Ps. 33:6-9). Matter is *not* eternal. *God* is eternal. Matter exists because God commanded it to exist.

Second, the psalmist states that those in heaven should praise the Lord because (v. 6), "He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away." As I said, the latter phrase refers to the so-called "natural" laws by which God governs the physical universe. Unless He sets aside or overrules these laws (i.e., miracles), they function consistently so that the creation does not act in a chaotic manner.

The first phrase, "He has also established them forever and ever," does not contradict the prophecies that there will be a new heavens and new earth (Isa. 65:17; Matt. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev.

21:1). The new heavens and new earth will be made up of the same matter, but reconstructed and freed from the curse (Rom. 8:19-22). The main idea of verse 6 is that the creation is subject to the Creator. Psalm 111:2 says, "Great are the works of the Lord; they are studied by all who delight in them." The regularity of the creation, including its intricate design on both the micro and macro levels, should cause us to worship God who designed everything to function with such complexity and balance. Thus everything in the heavens should praise the Lord and cause us to join the chorus.

2. Everything and everyone on earth should praise the Lord (148:7-14).

Again, the psalmist first gives the roster of those on earth who should praise the Lord and then the reason they should praise Him.

A. The roster of those on earth that should praise the Lord includes everything and everyone (148:7-12).

We can divide this into the two broad categories of everything (that is, non-human creation) and everyone (human creation).

(1) Everything non-human on earth should praise the Lord (148:7-10).

The psalmist begins with the ocean deeps and the creatures that dwell there. "Sea monsters" refers to the whales, great sharks, and other large creatures in the sea. The psalmist had no idea of the vast diversity and complexity of marine life, but the more we learn, the more amazing it is. We recently watched the "Planet Earth" DVD on the seas. The great humpback whales give birth to their young in the warmer tropical seas, but there is not enough plankton there to feed them. So after nursing their young to the point where they can swim, just as the mother is about to starve, they begin to swim towards the colder arctic waters. Just the fact that God designed creatures to live in the sea that need to breathe air is remarkable! And that giant creatures, such as whales, eat mainly the tiny plankton is also amazing.

The psalmist goes on (v. 8) to call on all kinds of weather phenomena to praise the Lord. "Fire" probably refers to lightning, which as all of us who have been caught outside in a lightning storm know, is a frightening, powerful force. Hail can also be an amazing phenomenon, especially when it is the size of golf balls or

bigger. The word translated *clouds* usually means *smoke*. It could refer to the smoke created by lightning strikes or to the mist that rises from the snow (Willem VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. by Frank Gaebelin [Zondervan], 5:874).

Even "stormy wind," such as hurricanes and tornadoes, fulfill God's word. All of these elements of weather are under God's sovereign control. He sends or withholds them as He sees fit. If He sends rain and protects us from damaging storms, we should thank Him. If He sends drought or floods or destructive hail, we should humble ourselves in repentance before Him. The point is, the weather is not just a natural process. It comes from God and displays His glory. It should cause us to worship Him.

Next (v. 9) the psalmist calls on the mountains and hills, fruit trees and all cedars to praise the Lord, followed by (v. 10) beasts, cattle, creeping things (insects, reptiles), and birds. If people do not worship the angels or sun or moon or stars, they tend to worship the earthly creation. We have those here in Flagstaff who worship the peaks as their sacred mountains. When we were in Nepal, we saw sacred cows wandering all over the streets, while people are deprived of food. Studying the intricacy of trees, mammals, insects, reptiles, and birds should not cause us to worship any of them, but rather the One who spoke them into existence.

While we should be good stewards of God's creation (Gen. 1:26), it seems to me that the radical environmentalists cross the line and end up worshiping the creature, rather than the Creator. They fight to save the baby seals or polar bears, while at the same time they support the right to kill human babies, created in the image of God. Professing to be wise, they are fools (Rom. 1:21-23).

- (2) Every human on earth should praise the Lord (148:11-12).

The psalmist starts with the most powerful people on earth, kings, princes, and judges (v. 11), then mentions young adults, older people, and children (v. 12). The idea is that no one is exempt from the duty and privilege of praising the Lord. The kings, princes, and judges need special exhortation to praise the Lord because they tend to be enamored with their own power and glory (Calvin, p. 308). As leaders, they should lead us all in praising God.

Young men and women, in the strength and beauty of life, should praise God for His many blessings. Older people should praise God for the years that He has given them. As they have had more years to know God and see His wonders, they should be advanced in praising Him. As they see their physical bodies declining, they should rejoice at the prospect of being with Christ forever (Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Cor. 4:16-18). Even little children should be learning to praise God. The point is, all people from the greatest and most powerful to the least and weakest should praise the Lord. Derek Kidner (*Psalms 73-150* [IVP], p. 488) observes with regard to verses 11 & 12, "In these few lines there emerges, quite incidentally and with unforced simplicity, the only potential bond between the extremes of mankind: a joyful preoccupation with God."

B. The reason that those on earth should praise the Lord is His great glory and grace (148:13-14).

Kidner (*ibid.*) makes a helpful comparison between the worship of God by the heavens (vv. 5-6) and the worship of God by people here (*italics his*):

In verse 5 the celestial bodies are called to praise God simply by the fact of their existence ('For he commanded and they were created'). But in 13, man may praise Him consciously, since He has revealed Himself ('For his name ... is exalted'). Similarly, God's glory in the natural world is the reign of law (6), the regularity which invites us to 'search out' His works (Ps. 111:2); but among His people His glory is redemptive love (14), in raising up *a horn* for them, *i.e.*, a strong deliverer (Lk. 1:69); above all, in bringing them *near to him*. That is the climax of the psalm, as it is of the gospel: 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people' (Rev. 21:3).

In verse 13, the Lord's name refers to all that He is in the perfection of His being. Since He is the only eternal being, the all-powerful Creator of everything else, "His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven" (v. 13).

Verse 14 praises God for His grace. The *horn* refers to strength. If the psalm was written after the return from Babylon, on one level the horn refers to the new, secure city of Jerusalem.

But prophetically, it looks ahead to the Savior. As Luke 1:69 declares, the Lord God of Israel “has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant.” “Praise” in the second line of verse 14 refers back to the horn. He is the object of our praise.

Verse 14 describes the Lord’s people in four ways. They are “His people” because He chose them and He redeemed them. We are not our own; we’ve been bought with a price. Second, they are “His godly ones.” We are set apart from this world unto the Lord. We must be growing in holiness. Third, they are “the sons of Israel.” This again points to God’s sovereign grace. He chose Abraham and miraculously gave him his son, Isaac. Of Isaac’s two sons, Jacob and Esau, God chose Jacob and changed his name to Israel. He preserved the sons of Israel through 400 years of slavery in Egypt, brought them miraculously out of slavery and into the promised land. When they sinned, He sent them into captivity in Babylon. But then He brought them back to the land and from the lineage of Israel through David, He brought the Savior into the world. We enter into the blessings of God’s covenant promises to Israel through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:11-22; Gal. 3:7).

That leads to the last description of God’s people, that they are “a people near to Him.” As Kidner said, that is the climax of the psalm and of the gospel. Paul writes (Eph. 2:13, 17-18), “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.... And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.” If you are near to God through the blood of Christ, then the final exhortation is appropriate: “Praise the Lord!”

Conclusion

I hope that you can see from our study of the Psalms that praising God is not optional. It’s not something nice to do whenever you feel like it, but it doesn’t really matter. Rather, praising God is our highest calling. If you are not continually filled with praise to God, then you are not yet fulfilling the purpose for which He created you and saved you. Join the psalmist in resolving (Ps. 71:14), “But as for me, I will ... praise You yet more and more.”

Application Questions

1. Should Bible-believing Christians be environmentalists? To what extent? Justify your answer biblically.
2. Can a Christian hold to the truth of the Bible and at the same time believe in theistic evolution? Why/why not?
3. Why is the doctrine of creation emphasized so often in the Psalms, which also emphasizes praising God? What is the connection? How is God's glory tied into His role as Creator?
4. What are some practical ways that you could carry out the resolve to praise the Lord yet more and more?

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