

Let Heaven & Earth Give Thanks

From the Psalms

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Bible Text: Psalm 148:1-14

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Our text is Psalm 148. Hear God's Word.

Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
Praise Him in the heights!
Praise Him, all His angels;
Praise Him, all His hosts!
Praise Him, sun and moon;
Praise Him, all stars of light!
Praise Him, highest heavens,
And the waters that are above the heavens!
Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For He commanded and they were created.
He has also established them forever and ever;
He has made a decree which will not pass away.

Praise the LORD from the earth,
Sea monsters and all deeps;
Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
Mountains and all hills;
Fruit trees and all cedars;
Beasts and all cattle;
Creeping things and winged fowl;
Kings of the earth and all peoples;
Princes and all judges of the earth;
Both young men and virgins;
Old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory is above earth and heaven.
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!

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for your Word. Now as we have this short opportunity to take a look into it, we pray that you would be pleased to give us your grace and blessing. And we pray, Father, that we might, indeed, give you the praise that you are due through Jesus Christ who is the Lord. Amen.

Perhaps some of you have seen the recent advertisements of the American Humanist Association. One of them is quite simple. It has been displayed on billboards in various locations. "Don't believe in God."

Another one simply asks the question: "Why believe in God?" And then in smaller font, on the same advertisement, this statement: "Just be good for goodness' sake."

Well, this perspective of the National Humanist Association runs cross grain, of course, to the Bible. It is antithetical, this position is antithetical to the Bible and it is antithetical to the psalm which is before us this morning, Psalm 148. Psalm 148 not only gives us an exhortation to praise the Lord it also gives us the rationale for giving praise to the Lord. That is, you are to praise the Lord, and join all the hosts of heaven and earth in praising the Lord, because he created you and he sustains you and he gives you strength.

And this is the point that I want you to get this morning from Psalm 148. You are to join the hosts of heaven and earth to give praise to God because he created you and sustains you and gives you strength.

As you look at the psalm you will notice that there are two divisions in the beginning of this psalm. Verse one or, at least the latter part of verse one, has these words, "Praise the LORD from the heavens."¹ And then if you look at verse seven, "Praise the LORD from the earth."² And so heaven and earth are enjoined to give praise to God.

And not only heaven and earth, but within heaven and earth the inanimate, that which does not have the breath of life is enjoined to give praise to God, and also the animate, that which does have the breath of life is enjoined to give praise to God.

Look, for example, first of all, at verses three and four. "Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light! Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens!"³

Certainly, all of the heavens and all that the heavens contain do give praise to God. The heavens do declare the glory of God and the firmament his handiwork.⁴ But the psalm focuses on the sun and the moon. The sun is that fiery ball 93 million miles distant from earth. It is that fiery ball which sheds its light and its heat appropriately, at the right

¹ Psalm 148:1.

² Psalm 148:7.

³ Psalm 148:3-4.

⁴ See Psalm 19:1.

temperatures, upon the earth so that life may be sustained. And the moon, which when full, casts its glow upon the earth in the evening hours by reflecting the light from the sun.

“Praise the Lord, sun and moon, Praise him,” verse three goes on to say, “all stars of light,”⁵ The sun is one of those smaller stars in our galaxy whirling through the universe. Yes, it is a smaller star. And when you look on a clear night into the evening sky, you are able to see that band of stars that we call the Milky Way. You are looking, as it were, through the saucer of our galaxy toward its edge so that all those stars seem to be equally distant from you. That band of stars is glorious in the heavens. Give praise to God sun and moon and stars of light.

And perhaps you have seen some of those NASA photographs peering further in the distance beyond our own galaxy. And you see a myriad of little saucer shaped lights. These are other galaxies, in and of themselves, containing hundreds of thousands and myriads of stars. And they too bring glory to God. The psalmist calls them, too, to give praise to him. “Praise Him, highest heavens.”⁶

You may remember the apostle Paul spoke about being caught up into the third heaven, that which is above the stars. Then there is that canopy over the earth that the Bible calls the firmament in which the stars are hung. That is how we see it, at least, from our vantage point. And then the lower heavens, as it were, the atmosphere which envelopes this world, the highest heavens and the lowest of the heavens are to give praise to God.

Verse four says, “Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens!”⁷ The psalmist probably has in mind the clouds that are floating in the upper atmosphere. They shed their moisture on the earth to give the rain which we often enjoy. And so the heavens, the inanimate in the heavens, are to give praise to God.

And then if you look down in verse seven, again. “Praise the LORD from the earth, Sea monsters and all deeps; Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word.”⁸

The lightning, the lightning that cracks and crackles and crashes in the storm indicates the power of God. The snow and the clouds and the stormy wind, those winds of the hurricane that have come and we have seen in the Gulf of Mexico. They do not blow lightly but with gale force, hurricane force, an hundred miles an hour, an hundred and twenty miles an hour, an hundred an forty miles an hour. They have great velocity ripping and tearing everything in their path. The power of God is on display. The psalm continues, “Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word; Mountains and all hills; Fruit trees and all cedars.”⁹

⁵ See Psalm 148:3.

⁶ Psalm 148:4.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Psalm 148:7-8.

⁹ Psalm 148:8-9.

Think of the mountains, as you travel west on I-70 or on I-80 and you approach those Colorado Rockies. You see the majesty of those mountains in the distance. It seems as though you could reach out and touch them. And yet they are far distant. When you drive closer, you have a greater vantage point. You see the majesty of those fourteen thousand foot peaks. They indicate the greatness of our God.

“[The] fruit trees and all cedars.”¹⁰ A good friend of many of us, close to New Castle, in the forested area behind his house, has a tree that he suspects is over 200 years old. It took three of us holding out our arms to hug this particular tree. Again, he suspects this tree began to flourish during the American Revolution. It is a tree of great age. And our God is one who is eternal and has placed all of these things in their respective locations.

These are the inanimate things of the universe called to give praise to God. But also the psalmist calls that which is animate in heaven and earth to give praise to God. Look, again, at the beginning of the psalm. “Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! Praise Him, all His angels.”¹¹

The angels are those glorious, spiritual beings gathered around the throne of God giving him praise day and night, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty.”¹² Yes, these beings are of great in glory. Yet they themselves are called to give praise to one who is exalted above them in glory and in honor. They must give glory to God. These angels are ministering spirits sent to give aid to the likes of you and me, those of us who are called by God to inherit eternal life. These ministering spirits are called to render service to the likes of you and me so that we will not stumble over the gospel and stumble over Jesus Christ. These ministering spirits are called to give praise and honor and glory to God. In the highest of the heavens they are called to give this glory.

And then, you notice, in the second part of the psalm, once again, in verses 10 and following, “Beasts and all cattle; Creeping things and winged fowl.”¹³ Yes, the beasts of the field, created by God, the beasts of the field like the rabbits and the squirrels. And once in a while by our house we smell a skunk that goes by. And we have a groundhog in our backyard. The psalm speaks of little creatures like this. But they are not the only ones, the larger animals also, the reindeer and the caribou and animals of such character and stoutness. And the psalm has in mind the creeping things too. Oh, yes, those snakes and those spiders. Some of you children like to pull up rocks and look underneath them to see the little creepy crawlers that are present there. All such creatures are called to give praise to God. And the winged fowl of every size and character from the little sparrow that flirts in your back yard and the robin and the blue jay and the cardinal as they build their nests and you can see them from your kitchen window. And also the larger birds, the eagle and such animals that cruise at great altitudes, give praise to God.

¹⁰ Psalm 148:9.

¹¹ Psalm 148:1-2.

¹² See Revelation 4:8.

¹³ Psalm 148:10.

And not only these creatures but the psalm goes on, “Kings of the earth and all peoples.”¹⁴ Every category of human being is called by God to give praise. This includes the kings of the earth. The kings of the earth should understand that they are put in their positions by God and that they are ministers of God. They are to execute his designs and his desires in the earth. Kings of the earth are to give praise to him. Presidents and prime ministers are to do so. All the people in their domains are also to give praise to God.

“Princes and all judges of the earth.”¹⁵ Oh, yes, those judges about whom we complain often in our own society and in our own corners of the world. We complain sometimes about their judgments. They ought to praise God. The psalmist calls upon them to give honor to God and to render their judgments understanding that they are servants of God most high.

“Both young men, and maidens.”¹⁶ All of you young people, male and female. And you old men, as some of you here in this congregation—I’ll count myself among that number—“old men and children.”¹⁷ You children need to learn to praise the Lord and learn the psalms as we sing them and raise your voices to God in praise.

I noticed, in the office, that the catechism is being taught. I thank the Lord for that. You young children need to learn the good things of God taught to you in the catechism so that you too can give praise to God.

And so the hosts of heaven and earth, animate and inanimate, are to give praise to God. And why is this the case? The psalmist does not leave us hanging in this regard. Look, if you would, at verse five. “Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created.”¹⁸ They were created. All the host of heaven, animate and inanimate, all the host of earth, animate and inanimate, God called them into being by the Word of his power. He is the one, after he created this world by the word of his power, called the trees and the grass and the flowers to spring forth from the earth. And he is the one, by the Word of his power, who simply spoke and he called forth from the earth every beast of the field and every creeping thing on the face of the earth. And he is the one who took the dust from the earth in his hand and formed out of that dust a man, Adam, and he breathed into that man he created the breath of life. And he took out of his body a rib and fashioned that rib into a woman. And so it was that humanity was brought into being by the great God of all.

“Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light!”¹⁹

“[Praise Him] Kings of the earth and all peoples.”²⁰

¹⁴ Psalm 148:11.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Psalm 148:12.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Psalm 148:5.

¹⁹ Psalm 148:3.

²⁰ Psalm 148:11.

Why? Because he created them all. And as if that were not enough, that praise is to come from our hearts and trip across our lips because he is the exalted creator, not simply the creator, but the exalted creator.

Look down, if you would, at verse 13 in Psalm 148. “Let them praise the name of the LORD, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven.”²¹ His name alone is to be exalted.

Oh, how it is that men and women puff up themselves. Perhaps, you have been in that circumstance where you have felt, “Oh, yes, I am exalted. I am in a good position.” And maybe you and I ought to remember the great God of heaven who is exalted above all. He is lifted up, the word means, above all.

Verse 13, again, “For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven.”²² His glory, the New American Standard Version reads. The other versions read, I think, his majesty, his majesty is above all. And that word “majesty” or “glory” has, as part of its meaning, weight or weightiness. Of course, gold is a heavy metal. It is a metal that has some substance and weight. And we consider it valuable because this is the case.

And I may ask you, who is it that carries the weight in your life? Who is it you consider all glorious? Is it God? Is it the Lord above who carries the weight in your life? Or perhaps you attempt at times to throw your weight around. I have done that. But in the end who is it that has full authority to throw his weight around? Is it not the creator of all, the one who set this world spinning in its orbit around the sun and placed the likes of you and me in this world? He alone has the authority to truly throw his weight around. He is the creator, exalted over all.

And not only are the hosts of heaven and earth to give the great God of heaven praise because he creates all including you and me, but he sustains all. Look at verse six in Psalm 148. “He has also established them,”²³ that is, all the things that he created, “He has also established them forever and ever; [And] He has made a decree which will not pass away.”²⁴

You notice that little word “decree” in verse six. What are the decrees of God? “The decrees of God are his eternal purpose whereby for his own glory he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”²⁵ God is the all glorious one. The catechism then asks the question, “How does God execute his decrees?”²⁶ And listen to the answer, “God executeth his decrees in [his] works of creation and providence.”²⁷ Providence.

²¹ Psalm 148:13.

²² Ibid.

²³ Psalm 148:6.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer #7.

²⁶ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question #8.

²⁷ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer #8.

And I notice in the classroom that question. What is God's providence? And what is the answer? Who would like to give it? "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all [of] his creatures."²⁸ And how does it go? "all [of] his creatures and all [of] their actions."²⁹ "...his most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all [of] his creatures and all [of] of [his] actions."³⁰

You see, the great God of all is not that deistic god in whom some believe who is, they think, the great architect of heaven, the clockmaker, as it were, who winds up creation and then lets it go. But he is the one who preserves and governs all of his creatures and all of their actions. He is persevering you and me. And it doesn't matter where we are in this world, whether we are here in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, or whether we find ourselves in Afghanistan or Iraq. God is present. He is preserving all of his creatures and all of their actions. Does this not give you some confidence in the God of heaven and give you a reason to praise him?

And you know this text in Romans, "All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes."³¹ This is not just a text that you put on a plaque and hang on your wall and look at once in a while. This is the truth of God, "that all things work together for good to those that love God and are called according to his purposes."³²

And do you know what that means, friends? It means that every molecule in the universe, every sub atomic particle in the universe, is working together for your good. It means that God is working everything in this universe together for the benefit of people like you and me. It means that nothing takes place in this universe except that God's hand is present working it out for your good.

I thank God that this is the case. And I thank God that when you drive from your home across the parkway, across the bridge, through the tunnel, up the hill to this church building, every step, every revolution of the tires on your car, are guided, ultimately, by the hand of God to bring you to your appointed destination. God's hand, friends, is preserving and governing all of his creatures and all of their actions.

We are sometimes asked the question: How is it that the sovereign God of the universe can be in absolute control of all things and at the same time people like you and me can make a multitude of decisions each day and do so freely? Aren't this freedom and this sovereignty ultimately contradictory? According to the Bible they are not. And my simple answer to this seeming dilemma is another question.

You believe that God is almighty and can do all things. Then is it not possible for the Almighty to be in absolute control of all things and at the same time create individuals

²⁸ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer #11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Romans 8:28.

³² Ibid.

who freely make decisions? Is it not possible for God who is almighty to do this very thing? I say, yes it is, because he is the one who governs all of his creatures and all of their actions.

And God is worthy of praise in heaven and on earth not only because he created all things and sustains all things, but also because he is the one, ultimately, who gives you the strength that you have.

Look at our psalm again, verse 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.”³³ He has lifted up a horn for his people.

In the poetic literature the horn is a symbol of power and strength. And what has God done? He has given power and strength to his people, to the likes of you and me. And what is the source of this power? Yes, God, but look again at verse 14. “And He has lifted up a horn for His people, Praise for all His godly ones.”³⁴ In other words, the God of heaven, coming to you and me, transforming you and me by giving us new hearts and putting his law within our hearts puts praise upon your lips, praise for the great God of heaven. And it is, in the end, the joy of the Lord, the praise of the Lord which is your strength.

And so it is that verse 14 tells us, “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”³⁵ Why? Why does he give you strength? Because he has seen fit, friends, in Jesus Christ, to draw you near to himself by Jesus Christ so that he would have a people who would give him glory and praise and honor. This was his desire and this was the deep motive within his own heart, to have a people which would give him praise forever and ever and ever.

Verse 14, again, “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.”³⁶ And, of course, how is it that God draws near to you? Again, it is in Jesus Christ, is it not? Emmanuel, who is God with us.

And I would submit to you that it is the Lord Jesus Christ about whom the psalm speaks. Look at the psalm again, verse one. “Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens”³⁷

Verse five. “Let them praise the name of the LORD.”³⁸

Verse seven. “Praise the LORD from the earth.”³⁹

³³ Psalm 148:14.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Psalm 148:1.

³⁸ Psalm 148:5.

³⁹ Psalm 148:7.

Verse 13. “Let them praise the name of the LORD.”⁴⁰

And verse 14, at the very end of the psalm. “Praise the Lord.”⁴¹

This is none other than Jesus Christ who is the Lord. And is this not the confession that you make? This is the confession Paul encourages you to make in Romans chapter 10, “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”⁴² And when you make this confession, that Jesus is Lord, you are not simply saying that he is a great being, that he is someone to whom reverence ought to be paid. No, he is much more than that. You are confessing that he is God incarnate. You are confessing that Jesus Christ is the second person of the trinity. You are confessing that the God of heaven has chosen to make himself known in this world by way of the second person becoming a man and taking on human form just like us.

It is the Lord Jesus Christ to whom you are to give praise. And is he, friends, the creator. John tells us plainly, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...[And] all things came into being through Him.”⁴³ He is the Creator.

And he is also the one who sustains, this Jesus Christ. Paul confesses, “All things hold together through him,”⁴⁴ that is, through Jesus Christ.

And he is the one who strengthens. The apostle Paul also makes this confession. “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”⁴⁵ Yes, he is the one who gives strength to face every contingency of life. And you ought to, therefore, give praise to Jesus Christ along with the hosts of heaven and the hosts of earth because he is the one who created you. He is the one who sustains you. He is the one who strengthens you.

Are you not amazed at this National Humanist Association? “Don’t believe in God.” And the question: Why believe in God? These statements in and of themselves presuppose the existence of God. And these humanists are caught on the horns of a dilemma. They are playing the fool. “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”⁴⁶ And they are playing the fool. And one day they will understand the foolish position they are taking.

And then this statement also: “Just be good for goodness’ sake,” as though goodness, in and of itself, is an ultimate standard of some sort. As though goodness were some sort of

⁴⁰ Psalm 148:13.

⁴¹ Psalm 148:14.

⁴² Romans 10:9

⁴³ John 1:1 and 3.

⁴⁴ See Hebrews 1:3.

⁴⁵ Philippians 4:13.

⁴⁶ Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1.

absolute. But, we ask, where is this ultimate derived? Jesus Christ asked, “Why do you call me good? There is none good but God alone.”⁴⁷

And so if you are going to be good, ultimately, you must be God-like. You must be conformed to his image. And you cannot, you cannot exclude God. Ultimately, you must give him praise. And you are called this morning, by way of Psalm 148, to join the hosts of heaven and the hosts of earth in the praise of Jesus Christ because he created you and he sustains you and he gives you strength.

Let us pray together.

Father, may we hear the message of this simple psalm and give you the honor and the praise you alone are due? Grant that we might from the heart join the hosts of heaven and of earth in giving Jesus Christ the praise he is due because of his creating us and sustaining us and strengthening us in this life in which we find ourselves. Bless us to this end we do pray in the good name of Jesus Christ who alone is exalted on high and who alone is worthy of all of our praise. Hear us in his name, we do ask. Amen.

⁴⁷ See Mark 10:18; See Luke 18:19.