

We don't normally have a priest blow a ram's horn during worship,
 and we don't have a group of Levites playing lutes and lyres, harps and cymbals,
 and we don't typically dance up and down the aisles while the pastor preaches,
 so what do you do with Psalm 150?!

Is this just something "cultural" which we don't do,
 or are we missing something?
 Should we get together an orchestra,
 and dance around the sanctuary during worship?

Psalm 150 is the conclusion to the whole Psalter.
 The Psalter has five books within it—
 just like the five books of Moses.
 And each of the five books of the Psalter ends with a doxology:
 for instance, Psalm 41 ends the first book with the doxology,
 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel
 from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and amen."

The doxology of the fifth book consists of at least the last five Psalms (146-150)
 all of which proclaim the praises of the Lord,
 building up the crescendo of praise and exaltation to the God of Israel,
 climaxing with the jubilant exuberance of this Psalm.
 So Psalm 150 is not only the doxology for the fifth book of the Psalter,
 it is also a doxology to the whole Psalter--
 a declaration of praise to Yahweh,
 and a call to all Israel to join in the praise due to his name.

Notice that every phrase is in the imperative.
 This is a command that everything in heaven and on earth must praise Yahweh.

The whole book of Psalms has been leading up to this.
 The book of Psalms ends the way all history will end—
 praising God in his sanctuary.

What is the chief end of man?
 Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever!

But what is *your end*?
 I know – you have the right answer already!!
 “Glorify God...enjoy him forever”
 But what is the end—the goal—that you are driving towards?

Psalm 150 tells us that praising God is our chief end.
 This is what we were created to do.
 Everything that has breath must praise the LORD.

1. Praise the LORD in His Sanctuary for His Mighty Deeds (150:1-2)

Verse one identifies who is to be praised.

Praise Yahweh.

Praise God in his sanctuary.

The sanctuary refers the temple--the holy place where God meets his people.
And the earthly temple is but a reflection of the high and holy place,
where God dwells in heaven.

Therefore the next line states,

Praise him in his mighty heavens.

Why would you call the heavens "mighty"?

With our modern view of the world this may seem strange.

But literally we would translate this "praise him in the firmament of his power."

Or even, "Praise him in the dome of his power"

The word translated "heavens" in the ESV is *not* the Hebrew word for heavens,
but the word *raqia*--the same word which is used in Genesis 1:6-8,
when God separated the waters above from the waters below by a "raqia",
which has been translated firmament or expanse,
but seems to mean "dome."

The simplest way to understand it is by going outside and looking up.

What do you see?

A dome--right?

What color is the sky? Blue.

What color is a lake or ocean? Blue.

So why is the sky blue?

Because there is water on the other side.

The biblical authors pictured the universe as one huge cosmic sea--
and the *raqia*--the dome--is what God created to keep the waters above
from overwhelming us here below.

This is why when God opened the floodgates of the heavens in Noah's day,
the earth was deluged with the great Flood.

This shouldn't be a problem for us.

Just like the Biblical authors say that the sun goes around the earth--
and just like they talk about the four corners of the earth,
and the pillars which hold it up--
so also they thought of the sky as a solid dome.

We see this in Ezekiel 10:1, where he saw

"the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the *raqia* (the dome--same word)
that was over the heads of the cherubim."

In other words,

If this is earth, and this is the dome above the earth,
then God's throne sits on the top of the dome,

and all the heavenly hosts look down through the sea of glass (Rev 4-6)
in order to see the earth.

This is also what Isaiah is referring to in Isaiah 40:22 when he says that God,
"sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in."

God sits at the pinnacle of the dome over all the earth.

This is a picture of his sovereignty and power.

This is why the Psalmist calls it the dome of his power.

All the area under the dome is under his control,

and he alone is the true God who reigns supreme over all creation.

God is sovereign over all the earth.

This statement of the "dome of his power" or his "mighty heavens"

is the backdrop for the call in verse 6, *let everything that has breath praise the LORD.*

God is sovereign over all nations—

therefore all nations – every living thing – should praise him.

Verse 2 then explains *why* we should praise him:

Praise him for his mighty deeds;

praise him according to his excellent greatness!

The Psalms tell us a great deal about God's mighty deeds

as he delivered his people from Egypt in the days of Moses,

or from the Philistines by the hand of David.

How did God demonstrate his mighty deeds?

God went before his people and defeated all their enemies.

God is a Warrior,

who goes out and demolishes Israel's foes.

So when you say, "praise him for his mighty deeds,"

You are saying, "praise him for defeating our enemies!"

In other words,

this Psalm is a victory Psalm--

a song which the Israelites would sing after God had given them victory
over their enemies.

God wins the battle, and then we praise him for it!

That is the lesson of history – that is the lesson of the cross!

2. Praise the LORD with a Lot of Noise! (150:3-6)

This perhaps helps us understand verses 3-6.

The reason why they are singing and dancing in the streets,

is because God has defeated their enemies.

Throughout the OT, whenever the army came back victorious,
the people would all come out singing, and playing their instruments,
(think of how they came out in celebration after David defeated Goliath).
The instruments were also used in the feasts of Israel
when the people of God celebrated God's triumph over Egypt,
and the victory that he gave them in giving them the land.

Let's look a little at some of these instruments.

The trumpet (actually a ram's horn) was used for calling people to worship,
or for calling the army to battle.

In worship it was blown by the priest only.

It was not a melody instrument at all—

it was really loud – and therefore really useful at summoning the people.

The other instruments would have been used for all sorts of celebrations,
including the victory celebration.

We hear in 1 Chronicles 15 that David established musicians for the temple,
from among the Levites, who would play loudly on musical instruments—
and the instruments in Psalm 150 are the same instruments as David had appointed.

Some have argued that since the instruments were used by the Levites in the temple,
as a part of the sacrificial worship of Israel;

therefore since we have neither Levites nor a sacrificial system,
we should not use instruments in worship.

In fairness to that position,

I should point out that it seems quite clear

that the apostles did *not* use instruments in worship.

In fact, it was only in the middle ages that instruments began to reappear in worship.

And since instruments were only introduced in the time of David

(they were not used in the days of Moses, for instance),

I would not say that instruments are necessary for worship.

But passages like Psalm 150 make it clear that instruments are acceptable to God.

Since we come to the heavenly temple,

where the Son of David rules over all the earth,

we may certainly use instruments to praise our God.

We do have sacrificial worship—

because in our worship we come to Jesus

who is the once-for-all sacrifice

who is also our priest at the right hand of the Father.

And so we, as a congregation, are the Levites!

We sing and make music to God together.

I would like to call your attention to the last instrument in the list:

The ESV calls this "the loud clashing cymbals",

the word there is *teruah*--

which is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to refer to either
blowing or shouting the battle-cry.

Here, it would seem to refer to a kind of cymbal which was used
as an imitation of the sound of battle--

like the clashing of swords and shields against each other.

In other words, these cymbals clashing together

would remind the people of battle,

and how God had won the victory over their enemies.

The Psalm concludes by commanding all that has breath to praise Yahweh,
drawing our attention once again to the supreme sovereignty of the Lord
over all his creation.

Your God is a Warrior who goes out and does battle against your enemies,
because you are too weak and too puny to defeat them yourself.

He does this to show forth his glory--and to demonstrate his love for you.

Because if he didn't--

then you would wind up as slaves to the wicked kings of the Canaanites.

3. David and Israel/Jesus and Us

God is a warrior--

and his name is Jesus Christ.

Just as God triumphed over Israel's physical enemies in the OT,

so also God has triumphed over our spiritual enemies in the cross of Jesus Christ.

When you read the Psalms,

remember that they were the hymnbook of Israel.

They are all ultimately about Jesus Christ, the Son of David,

pointing to his coming,

so when Jesus was on earth,

Jesus was singing the Psalms about himself.

Jesus knew that it was his task to defeat all our enemies,

so when he sang this Psalm in the temple or in the synagogue,

he sang it in anticipation of the victory which the Father had promised him.

he was absolutely confident in the supremacy of God over all things,

and therefore could praise his Father with all joy and faith.

But the most fitting time for Jesus to sing this Psalm

would have been after his resurrection--

because it was after God had given him that final victory:

sin and death were destroyed--

God had shown forth the fulness of his greatness,

and in the battle-cry of the Son of God--"IT IS FINISHED"--
the great act of God's deliverance was accomplished.
Jesus Christ was sent by the Father on a solo mission
to seek and destroy all the enemies of his people.
He did hand-to-hand combat with the Devil during the temptation in the wilderness.
He faced down sin and death all through his ministry--
driving out demons,
healing the sick,
raising the dead,
even forgiving sins--
all as a part of his warfare.

But all that was just preliminary skirmishes,
staking out positions for the final battlefield--
When Jesus Christ came to Gethsemane on the night in which he was betrayed,
the final battle began.
Luke 22 records that Jesus told his disciples to buy swords--
apparently they already had two--
but Jesus was not referring to physical warfare--
he was referring to the violent struggle between the kingdom of light
and the kingdom of darkness
which had already begun in the treachery of Judas Iscariot.
Luke 22:43 tells us that in the middle of that battle,
an angel came and strengthened Jesus--
even the Son of God needed assistance in the midst of that battle.
Then Judas came and betrayed the eternal Son of God with a kiss,
Jesus looked at his captors and said--
"this is your hour--when darkness reigns."
There has never been a battle like that in the history of the universe--
the battle raged through the night,
and the salvation of mankind hung in the balance
as Pilate and Herod played political games
with One who had the power to strike them dead on the spot.
But they decided to crucify the Divine Warrior--
and in that final blow,
they unwittingly sealed the fate of their Evil Master.
For if the Divine Warrior died,
he would forever destroy the power of sin, death and the devil.
And in Christ's death and resurrection,
all the forces of evil were dealt a shattering blow.
God is a Warrior--
and his name is Jesus Christ.

So now we too may sing Psalm 150 with the full assurance
that Yahweh has won the battle for us in Jesus Christ,
and that all power and authority rests in his hands.

And remember that Christ's victory is also physical:

When he returns, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord.

One way or another,
everything that has breath *will* praise the Lord.

So the proper way to read this Psalm
is as a song of praise for the victories of the Divine Warrior.

When we come together to worship,

we are here to celebrate what he has done.

we are here to praise him in his strength--

to declare his mighty power,

and to admire his glorious greatness.

we are here as a firstfruit of the praise which his glory deserves,

and we are here to rejoice because we have received the benefits of his victory.

And yes, we are here to dance!

Praise him with tambourine and dance.

Some churches are taking this literally.

I've heard a number of stodgy Presbyterian ministers

admit that when an African congregation dances,

they seem to be doing the right thing,

but when white people dance,

it just doesn't work.

Perhaps this is because western culture has turned dancing into either performance or romance.

We either have a big performance where trained dancers show off their talents,

or else we have a romantic date where we're dancing "cheek to cheek."

Neither of those is what Psalm 150 is about.

That's why "liturgical dance" is (to put it bluntly) wrong.

Rather dancing is what the people of God do when God defeats their enemies!

When David boogied into Jerusalem,

bringing the ark of the covenant into the city that God had chosen,

that was a dance of triumph.

When Miriam and the women praised God with tambourines and dancing,

it was because God had just drowned the armies of Pharaoh in the Red Sea!

How shall I encourage you to dance before the LORD?

Too many of our dance steps in western culture are sexual.

Are we capable of dancing in a way that pleases God?

I don't know.

But Psalm 150 commands us to praise the LORD with dancing,
and so dance we must.

At the very least,
dancing means that it is not just our minds,
but also our bodies that are engaged in praising God.

When we have the Lord's Supper you are called to dance!
Because after all, the Lord's Supper is the feast of God for the people of God,
and when the people of God come to the feast of our Lord Jesus Christ,
we are celebrating the great triumph of God over our enemies.

It's hard to dance while you are sitting down.
But maybe, just maybe,
even this bunch of staid and stodgy Presbyterians can dance
as we celebrate the triumph of Jesus!

But it's not just on Sundays that we sing this Psalm!
You can sing this Psalm everyday,
because Jesus Christ is still the Divine Warrior.
He still goes before his people daily to do battle against their enemies.
Ephesians 6 presents for us a picture of spiritual warfare,
telling us that we still face the battle.
After D-Day, when the Allies took Normandy during World War II,
everyone knew that the Allies were going to win.
But some of the heaviest fighting of the war took place after that,
before the Germans finally surrendered on VE Day.
Some of the bloodiest battles took place during the Allied drive
from the coast toward Berlin.

Even so,
Jesus Christ accomplished our salvation on D-Day, 2000 years ago,
but there is still some bloody fighting left before us.
Paul tells us that our battle is not against flesh and blood,
but against the rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world,
and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
There is only one way to survive in this war,
and that is to put on the full armor of God.
This armor was first described in Isaiah 49, 52, and 59 as the armor of the Messiah.
the belt of truth,
the breastplate of righteousness,
the shoes of the gospel of peace,
the shield of faith,
the helmet of salvation,
and the sword of the spirit.

This is what Jesus Christ wore into battle when he came to defeat our enemies.
Therefore this is what you need to wear,
if you are going to stand your ground in the evil day.
And the only way you can put on the armor of Christ,
is if you put on Christ himself.

And after each battle,
as your victorious Lord goes forth before you,
leading you from victory to victory,
sing his praises and marvel at the glorious salvation which he has accomplished.
Sing the hundred and fiftieth Psalm, and remember what he has done.

And when you come together each Lord's day,
remind each other that this is to be a day of celebration,
because our God is a Warrior,
and he has triumphed over all your enemies,
and he will lead you safely home.

Take comfort, Christian,
because your God is a Warrior,
and his name is Jesus Christ.
Praise the Lord!