

Scripture reading: **Psalm 134: Behold, bless Jehovah, All you servants of Jehovah, Who by night stand in the house of Jehovah! 2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless Jehovah. 3 Jehovah who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion!**

"The Psalms Demolish Our Gnostic Impulses"

Our friend Jim Jordon has commented that it may well take 10,000 years to rid the Church of various gnostic influences: We won't solve the whole problem today, but our study of this Psalm, and how we have used it, will give us some things to think about!

Gnostic thinking is hard to pin down and should be seen more as tendency than a firm set of principles... Here is what Jim Jordon has said:

"There are many descriptions of Gnosticism, but the best is that which recognizes that Gnosticism is the great counterfeit of Christianity, which has hounded it since the beginning. Gnosticism sees the issues of history in terms of knowledge and power, instead of in terms of faith and obedience. Gnosticism approaches history in terms of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, rather than in terms of the Tree of Life (which is approached on the basis of faith)."

The first thing to consider is how this short Psalm is translated into our native tongue of English and why you will often hear us use Jehovah in our Old Testament readings.

- **Did that Psalm sound familiar?**
- **It should, because we sing a paraphrase of it each week in worship!**

And if you made it to any of our Psalm sings, we have a text version there that we sing as well!

Here is what we sing from the Psalter, often as a round:

**"Behold, bless the LORD,
All you servants of the LORD,
Who by night stand in the house of the LORD!
2 Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.
3 The LORD who made heaven and earth Bless you from Zion!**

If you were following along in your Bibles as I read the text, you noticed that I said Jehovah where the text read the LORD. Your Bible should have LORD in all caps, and if it does not, I would suggest getting one that does!

- **Why is that important?**
- **Because when LORD is in all caps, it is the proper name of God given to Moses at the burning bush.**

In Exodus 3, we have Moses leading his flock to the back of the desert, when the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush, a bush burning but not consumed. Moses turns aside to look and then, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!"

And he said, "Here I am."

5 Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." 6 Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Moses is afraid, but God gives him his commission to return to Egypt to deliver God's people from slavery and oppression. Moses then asks an important and logical question:

13 "Indeed, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?"

14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

So here God gives Moses His name and in Hebrew we have only the consonants because the tradition of the Jews was to not even speak the name of God, even though He had clearly given it to Moses.

That name, I am that I am, or simply I AM, is used throughout the OT. Often you will hear people pronounce Y-H-W-H [the four Hebrew consonants] as an English transliteration of those consonants: Yahweh or something similar. However, when William Tyndale made the first English translation of the Bible he created an English word for Y-H-W-H: Jehovah.

- In either case we must make a distinction between the name of God, I am that I am, and one of His titles being the Lord.

The way this is done in most English Bibles is by putting the proper name of God as the LORD in all caps.

Thus when we read Psalm 8, we can see the difference when it says, "O LORD [all caps] our Lord [no caps] how excellent is your name in all the earth.

However, if I read aloud 'O LORD our Lord' that distinction is not as clear. Thus our practice, as I did with today's text, is to use Jehovah when reading 'the LORD' in all caps:

When reading Psalm 8 out loud, I would say Jehovah our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth.

Another example would be Psalm 110 where we would read it out loud as Jehovah said unto my Lord as opposed to The LORD said to my Lord.

The name of God is important in the NT as well where we see Jesus, Who John clearly stated was God, taking that title for Himself.

In John 8 "58 Jesus said to the religious leaders, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

- And they understood what He was saying because they took up stones to kill Him for blasphemy!

And again, notice the reaction to Jesus using the Name of God in the Garden when responding to their question about who He was:

6 "Now when He said to them, "I am He," they drew back and fell to the ground." [*mention Ben Hur*]

With that bit of background let me turn to where and how we use this Psalm in our liturgy. It comes in the second of the five major elements of what we call Covenant Renewal Worship, Confession & absolution.

All five elements have been part of traditional Christian worship for almost two thousand years.

- **The Call to Worship our Triune God**
- **The Confession & absolution of our sins**
- **The Consecration of the Saints**
- **The Communion meal with our Savior**
- **The Commission to disciple the nations**

Although we find such confession and forgiveness in the orders of worship from all corners of Christendom for the first 1800 years of church history, it has been largely lost in the Baptist, Evangelical, Charismatic and even reformed Churches here in America today.

- **This should remind us of how important it is to have a right understanding of worship & why we must make sure to pass along these truths to our children!**
- **At Church of the King, we are striving to better understand how the Bible informs us about the right worship of our God.**

I cannot spend much time on our overall worship today, but I did make copies of some study materials if this is new to any of you.

It includes a chart called “Understanding our Order of Worship from a covenantal framework in Scripture that can be both interesting & helpful.

Now we can turn to what I have called a Trinitarian paraphrase of Psalm 134 and how & why we use it in worship:

- **As we do this, we can consider a bit of how both our use of this song and our liturgy can help us resist some of the gnostic influences we want to avoid.**

One of the major problems with gnostic thinking is that the focus falls on the spirit far more than the body: Spirit good : Body bad.

- **However, the reality is that God cares about what BOTH our spirit and body do in this life!**

As Jim Jordan rightly points out, sin is man’s problem, matter is not.

In his first epistle, the Apostle John says he wants our joy to be full, and then stresses the importance of confessing our sins: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

- **Some have argued that we don’t need to do this in the service each week because Jesus has already forgiven our sins!**

This is true, but only part of the great truth about our justification...

- **By faith we know our sins were fully forgiven when Jesus declared ‘it is finished’ from the Cross, which was confirmed when He was raised in power from the dead and ascended to God’s right hand!**
- **Real events in history & not just ideas to ponder as a gnostic.**
- **With that said, we experience the need for that forgiveness of sins each time we obey John’s call to confess our sins.**
- **And, we will know the final forgiveness of our sins when Jesus reads our name from the Lamb’s Book of Life at the final judgment in our resurrected bodies!**

Taking the time to confess your sins during the day or in your morning prayers does not obscure the great doctrine of justification: It confirms it!

- **It is no different when we gather together for worship and also have the opportunity to confess our sins together before God.**

And each week we ask those who are able to kneel. Is that important?

It is IF you think God cares about what our bodies do! The gnostic thinks it is only what we do in our heart that really matters, not the position of our body.

So we take a moment to confess our individual sins and then we pray a corporate prayer of confession together:

This is a prayer and we pray it together! [*young children too!*]

And I would again remind us that in our time of confession we must simply be honest...

- **No making excuses for our actions, like I was tired or sick**
- **No blame shifting, which we learned well from our first parent: “The woman YOU gave me...”**
- **No comparison confessions, thinking what I did was not so bad compared to what someone else has done.**
- **Be serious, remembering, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**
- **It is here where we confront the often troubling question of whether God has really forgiven my sins...**

-- Some of us have very grievous sins in our past and always wonder if God could really forget all that...

-- Some of us have struggles with particular sins that seem to come back week after week, wondering if God can once again forgive us.

-- Some of us may have suddenly fallen into some grave sin almost unexpectedly and thus question whether we were ever saved at all.

- **This is why it is SO important that our honest confession be followed by what we call absolution...**

After we have honestly confessed our sins we hear an officer in Christ’s Church proclaim the Good News with a Scripture and the absolution!

- **The Bible reveals that we are forgiven in Jesus and the Scriptures and the minister now proclaim this truth!**
- **And we believe in faith, and hear that Good News once again standing before God!**

Please note that in giving the absolution, ‘Our sins are forgiven,’ Pastor Paul or myself, as ordained Elders, are simply declaring the truth of God’s Word!

- **We are forgiven because God says we are forgiven and that is a great comfort to His people!**
- **And here is where we use the Trinitarian paraphrase of Psalm 134, Come Bless the Father as our song of ascension as we demonstrate this reality each week:**

- The words are a Trinitarian paraphrase of Psalm 134 set to some of Amber Bartel's beautiful music and I pray it will always be a very special time for all of us in the service.

It is sung to remind us that we are coming boldly before the throne of grace: And again reminds us to resist that gnostic influences where we fear to let our physical bodies be involved as much as our minds & heart!

It is a hearty refrain that should be sung as those who have just heard again that they are forgiven and now stand in the very presence of our Holy God.

- We should sing it like we believe that great truth!

“Come bless the Father, all you servants of the Son, who stand by the Spirit in the House of the Lord...”

WE have responded to God's call and now as those IN Christ, by the power of the Spirit we can stand before God blessing His holy name! Being reminded of that should never become routine and certainly not old or boring... 6 In the Old Covenant, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and then only once a year with blood to represent the great sacrifice Jesus would make at the cross.

Now we come boldly each week before this Throne of Grace and sing with the Psalmist...

- “Lift up your hands to the Holy place and bless your God!”

So, two things to consider here:

First, what does the Psalmist tell us to do with our hands? [*yes, lift them up*]

So, the Biblical response should be to raise those hands toward heaven!

And parents this is not only a good time to present a great example, but we must also instruct our children about why it is an important action!

Second, what does the Psalmist tell us to do while raising our hands?

“Lift up your hands to the Holy place and bless your God!” is one of those lines that we can sing without really thinking about what we are singing!

Just how do WE bless God?

I thought it was God's job to bless us, which He certainly does in more ways than we can count. And yet, here we are told to bless God and we should consider just how we do that...

- I would argue that we do so as He sees us standing before Him clothed with His Son's righteousness!

Relating earthly examples to God is always dangerous, but here we do have some possible examples.

- Think of how a parent is blessed as they watch a child in their graduation robes crossing the stage.
- Or consider what a blessing it is for a general to watch one of his soldiers in their dress uniform receiving a medal of honor for his actions.

The Psalmist then goes on to declare with another amazing Truth:

“May the Lord bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth!”

- Another simple line set to beautiful music that can be easy to sing without thinking about what it means.

And here again what our bodies are doing can be just as important as what we are thinking & singing:

Our hands should shift from being uplifted to being outstretched to receive those blessings from God!

As we do our minds should try to grasp the wonder of a blessing from Him who made heaven and earth, and again our hands play a part.

- **Think of that catcher who always has his mitt positioned to receive a fast ball or curve ball!**
- **What can we possibly need that Almighty God the Creator of heaven & earth cannot provide?**

This creator is the God who we serve and He loves to bless His people!

And all of this comes in just one small part of our Covenant Renewal Worship. My prayer and hope is that we all continue to mature in our understanding of just how exciting it is to be called into the presence of Him who made heaven and earth each and every week!

- **And sadly we have only touched on the consideration of those gnostic tendencies we are to avoid.**

We saw how our bodies are to be involved in worship, not just by showing up but by kneeling and standing and singing and reading and listening and communing.

We must resist the Spirit good : Body bad thinking in so many other areas of life and I trust it will come up in some family & fellowship discussions in the coming weeks.

- **We know that our worship should be reverent, but that should not negate our enthusiasm.**

We must avoid thinking that LOVE is wonderful but then fear or even avoid passionate love-making.

We must avoid saying that we know God gives us each day our daily bread but then hesitate to present and enjoy rich food.

As we are reminded each week that we are blessed by the Creator of Heaven and earth it should remind us about how lacking our modern church has become when it come to great art & literature!

I could go on and on with examples, but at bottom, the resistance to all gnostic thinking comes by following the Two Great Commandments summarized by our Lord Jeus:

We are to love the Lord our God with ALL of our heart, soul, mind and STRENGTH and we are to love our Neighbor as ourself!

Communion Meditation: Matthew 7

**“24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them,
I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”**