

# Psalm 148:13-14

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn to Psalm 148. The beast from the east has pretty much dominated life and conversation over the past few days.

It's true that in Aberdeen we have been spared the more extreme effects of the weather compared to the central belt.

But nonetheless, it's pretty much dominated life in these past few days. And I guess for that reason, it's on my mind, I was drawn to the idea of a snow-themed sermon, whatever that is, for this evening.

And there are a few possibilities for a snow-themed sermon. Psalm 147, the psalm previous to the one we read, it could work. If you were here in the morning, you may remember that we sang the following verses from Psalm 147, from verse 15.

He sends His command to the earth. His word runs swiftly. He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down hail like pebbles. Who can withstand His icy blast?

[ 1 : 22 ] And it goes on. Well, that looks quite similar to what we've been experiencing in these past few days. But Psalm 148, the one that we have read, also speaks of hail, wind, and snow.

And as I was reading the psalm, which is a magnificent call to universal praise. The heavens are called to praise. The earth is called to praise. God's people are called to praise.

Those who are conscious and indeed unconscious. The animate and the inanimate. All called to praise God. But as I was reading the psalm, I was drawn not so much to what it says about snow, but to what it says about us in verse 14 in particular, where as God's people we are described as the people close to His heart.

Notice there in verse 14, the final expression there, well, just before praise the Lord, we have these words. Israel, the people close to His heart.

That's very beautiful language. And perhaps more importantly, it's beautiful language that gives expression or highlights a beautiful reality.

[ 2 : 40 ] We are a people close to God's heart. I want to spend a little bit of time this evening considering the final two verses of this psalm, verses 13 and 14, with that expression very much at the heart of what we're going to be saying, or what we're going to be saying revolving around that expression.

We won't only think about those words, but they'll be very much to the forefront in what we have to say. So, just the last two verses that we want to spend some time thinking about this evening.

And the way we're going to divide our thoughts is as follows. We're going to think, first of all, of how God views us as His people. How does God view us?

Then we're going to think about what God has done for us, because that also is highlighted in these two verses. Obviously, it doesn't tell us everything that He's done for us, but it does focus in on the heart, really, of what He has done for us.

So, how God views us, what God has done for us, and then finally just think a little bit about what God expects of us. In the light of who we are, in the light of what God has done for us, what does God expect of us?

[ 3 : 59 ] Perhaps not in return, but certainly in response. First of all, then, let's think a little bit about how God views us. In verse 14, we're described in three ways.

You could maybe stretch it to four, but I'm going to certainly just focus on three ways in which we are described by God. First of all, notice there, we read, He has raised up for His people a horn.

Now, we'll come in a moment to what that means. It sounds a little bit strange, the language. But at the moment, all I'm focusing in on is this description of us as His people.

We are His people. We are God's people. We belong to God. This reality is at the very heart of God's covenant with His people.

This reality that we belong to Him, that He is our God and we are His people. You can follow that thread throughout the Old Testament.

[ 5 : 01 ] We're not going to do that. But if we just remind ourselves of perhaps one of the first occasions where God expresses Himself in this way very explicitly in Genesis chapter 17, where He is establishing His covenant with Abraham.

We read there in chapter 17 of Genesis and in verse 8, the promise that He is making to Abraham, the whole land of Canaan where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you, and I will be their God.

So at the heart of God's covenant, at the heart of God's purposes, is that He would be our God, that we would be His people. When we turn to Jeremiah, and where Jeremiah is looking forward to that new covenant, that of course builds on the original covenant.

It's not completely new, but a new expression of God's covenant. We find also that same language. So in Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 33, we read as follows, And maybe that captures it very succinctly.

Who are we? We are God's people. We belong to God. And this is a tremendous privilege that we participate in.

[ 6 : 43 ] It's an eternal reality in many ways, that which God has determined from before the beginning of time. But we participate as God's people.

We experience what it is to God's people by faith in Christ. That is how we enter into that experience of being part of His people.

When we read there in John chapter 1, about the consequences of, or the outcome of putting our faith in Jesus, what is it that John says?

In John 1 and verse 12, we read, Yet to all who received Him, that is to all who received Jesus, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, to belong to God, to be part of God's family, to enjoy the privileges of being members of that covenant community.

So, who are we? We are God's people. But then the psalm, or the psalmist, also speaks of us in another way. In that same verse, in verse 14 of Psalm 148, He has raised up for His people a horn, the praise of all His saints.

[ 7 : 57 ] So, another description, another name for God's people. We are His saints. We don't want to dwell on that. We just want to note that description of us.

Those who are set apart by God. That's the idea of being saints, of being holy. In that sense, not so much of our moral conduct, though that is part of being holy, of being a saint, but here, very much in view, is the idea of being set apart by God, for God.

Now, that will have implications, in terms of our behavior, and our morality, and being holy in that sense. But the principal sense we have here, is this idea that God has set us apart.

From among the nations, He set apart Israel. He set us apart as His people. We are His saints. And then you have this third way in which we're describing, the one that I focused in on, even as we began the sermon.

This very beautiful language, that we are the people close to His heart. There at the end of verse 14. The people close to His heart. Let's just think a little bit about this expression.

[ 9 : 07 ] Maybe a little bit more than the ones that we've just noted. I think the language that the psalmist use here speaks of two wonderful realities, two connected realities, but I think we can distinguish between them.

I think it speaks of the affections of God towards us. Maybe that's the one that's prominent as we hear the words, close to His heart.

The affections of God towards us. But I think it also speaks of the actions of God on our behalf. First of all, let's think about His affections. Well, the language is very vivid.

We are close to His heart. We know what that language means. We use that language ourselves. When we speak of other people, we speak of somebody who's close to our heart. Somebody who's close to our heart.

Well, we know what that means. Somebody who is precious to us. Somebody for whom we have great affection. Somebody we love. Somebody who is important to us. Somebody close to our heart.

[10:06] It does speak very much of our affections. And it speaks of God's affections. Of God's love for us. Of how precious we are to Him.

We are close to His heart. He loves us dearly. But I think it also speaks, not so perhaps immediately obvious, but I think it also speaks of God's actions on our behalf.

A literal translation of the words translated, the people close to His heart, which I want to stress, I think is a very good translation, the people close to His heart. But a more literal translation would simply be a people close to Him.

And I think when we take that translation of the expression, I think it points to or hints at what God has done to bring those who were far from Him close to Him.

Now, there is a sense in which from eternity to eternity, we have been close to His heart. God's love or affection for us has never changed. It's not that He didn't love us and now He loves us.

[11:13] That doesn't change. But it is also true that in our experience, there is a time or there was a time when we were far from God, but God has acted to bring us close to Him.

So I think the expression does speak of, maybe principally, of God's affections. We are close to His heart, but it also hints at His actions, what He has done to bring us close to Him.

And we're going to think about that a little bit under the next section where we're going to think about what God has done for us. So I won't develop that more at this very moment. Maybe these two senses of the expression, His affections and His actions, are captured pithily by Spurgeon, who tends to be good for capturing things in very memorable language.

And he speaks of God as described, or what is said of God in this expression. He speaks of God as near to us by kin and care. By kin and care.

He's close to us because He's our God. He's our Father God. We're part of the family. But He's close to us also in the manner in which He cares for us, draws us ever nearer to Himself.

[12:30] So how God views us, we are His people, we are His saints, we are the people close to His heart. But also let's just notice what God has done for us. I think there are two things that verses 13 and 14 highlight.

First of all, He has made Himself known. Verse 13, Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted. His splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

Just the very fact that there's a mention here of the name of the Lord immediately speaks of a God who makes Himself known. When God revealed His name to Moses, it was with the intention of making Himself known, of revealing to Moses and through Moses to His people who He is, what kind of God He is.

And so God, what has He done for us? Well, He's made Himself known to us. And that is a reason for us to praise Him. Indeed, in the absence of that, it would be very difficult for us to praise an unknown God.

So that's the first thing we can say that He's done for us. But there's a second thing which I want to focus in on a little bit more. And it's the language that we find in verse 14. He has raised up for His people a horn.

[13:48] Now that sounds a bit odd to us. What does that mean? He has raised up for us a horn. The picture, the symbol of a horn is used in the Old Testament to speak of somebody, it could be anybody, somebody's strength or dignity, particularly their strength.

But then it became broader to just speak of their dignity, of their name, of their reputation. If we just notice, I'm going to have you looking at one or two verses in the Psalms in particular where this language is used to get a sense of how it is used in the Old Testament.

So for example, in Psalm 112 and in verse 9, we read, He has scattered abroad His gifts to the poor. I should say that this Psalm is speaking about the righteous man, the man who seeks to please God.

And he's been described, He has scattered abroad His gifts to the poor. His righteousness endures forever. His horn will be lifted high in honor. His horn, His identity, His dignity will be lifted high. But then the word horn is used also more specifically, not just about anybody, though it can be used about anybody, but more specifically about one who rules or a king.

[15:04] So let's notice what the psalmist says in Psalm 89. In Psalm 89 and reading from verse 20, I have found David, my servant.

With my sacred oil I have anointed him. So speaking of David being anointed as a king, my hand will sustain him. Surely my arm will strengthen him. No enemy will subject him to tribute.

No wicked man will oppress him. I will crush his foes before him and strike down his adversaries. My faithful love will be with him and through my name his horn, that is David's horn, will be exalted. And so it goes on. So there it's speaking or the same language is used but specifically of King David. raised up by God to rule over his people.

But then the same symbol, the same picture, the same language is used to speak of David's greater son, of God's promised, anointed one.

[16:06] So for example in Psalm 132, I think this is the last reference we'll look at in the Psalms. But in Psalm 132 and verse 17, Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one.

And it goes on. And so there it's speaking about David but it's also looking forward to David's greater son. And then bringing kind of this little exploration to a climax, I suppose, we can see what Zechariah says in Luke's gospel about Jesus, about David's greater son.

In Luke chapter 1 and verse 68, this is Zechariah's song of praise. And listen to what Zechariah says reading from verse 68. Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David as He said through the holy prophets of long ago, salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

And He goes on. But here is Zechariah speaking very specifically and deliberately about the birth of Jesus, the coming Messiah, and He describes Him in this same language.

[17:28] And in Zechariah's hymn of praise, we discover much of what Jesus, God's saving King, will do for us, save us from our enemies, how He will draw us to Himself, and so on.

We could go through the hymn, we're not going to. But in the light of our text, we can maybe mention one thing in particular that David's greater son, this horn that the Father is lifting up, one thing in particular that He'll do for His people, and that is that He will and has draw us near to God. Draw us near to God. The very thing that we said God does on our behalf because we are near to His heart. It's about His affection for us but also about His actions on our behalf.

He draws us near to Himself. And of course, that's what the New Testament speaks of in terms of Jesus' work on behalf of God's people.

He has come to draw us who were far from Him close to Himself. Let me just read one verse where that truth is stated very explicitly in Ephesians 2 and verse 13.

[18:45] But now, in Christ Jesus, this horn who has been raised up, this King raised up by God, but now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

We've been brought near to Him. We've been brought near to His heart. We were ever close to His heart, but now we've been brought near to Him in and through the person and work of Jesus, what God has done for us.

Let's just notice finally what God expects of us. Well, in the psalm, it's very clear that the principal response that God is looking for from the universe and especially from us as people is our praise. God expects and delights in the praise of His people and that praise is to be from us, praise that is conscious, intelligent, as we consider and ponder on who God is and all that He's done for us.

It is to be focused, it is to be grateful, it is to be jubilant and we could go on. This is the praise that God expects from us. It's the praise that He is worthy to receive from us.

[19:59] It's the praise that He delights in when we render it to Him. So that is what God expects of us. That's certainly the focus of the psalm. But let me just mention one other thing that I think we can draw from these final verses of the psalm.

Perhaps one other intriguing expectation on the part of God and I think it's this, He expects us to be the cause for others to praise Him.

So we are to praise Him but we're also to be the cause that others might praise Him. Notice there in verse 13, verse 13 begins, let them praise the name of the Lord.

Now, who are the them? Well, it's not the same people that the psalmist goes on to speak of as His people, His saints, the people close to His heart.

Rather, it's referring back to what the psalmist has said or the people he's identified in the previous verses. If we limit ourselves to human beings, it's the human beings we read of in verses 11 and 12.

[21:02] Kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord. So you see, they're the ones

that the psalmist is saying wishes to see praising God.

Okay. Now the question is, how will that happen? What is it that will draw the nations of the world, the princes, children, and old men? What will draw these people into this praising community? What will cause them to praise the Lord? Well, the second half of verse 14 is translated in the ESV somewhat differently to the NIV. So in the NIV, we read, I'll just read it in the version that we have, the church Bible.

It says, He has raised up for His people a horn, the praise of all His saints. Another way in which that can be translated is the praise for all His saints.

And so, if we understand it that way, what the psalmist is saying is that when the nations see what God has done for His people, when the nations see how He has provided a Messiah, a deliverer, a Savior, when those out with the community look on and say, wow, that's amazing what God has done for them, they're drawn in to praise God also.

[ 22 : 24 ] They say, what a God, what an amazing God that He would do that, that He would treat His people in such a gracious and loving way. And so, they are drawn in to join with us in praising God.

It kind of reminds me of the language of Psalm 126, that in the context of God delivering His people from exile. We could just read the first couple of verses of that psalm when the Lord brought back the captives of Zion.

We were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. And then, what does the psalmist say? Then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them.

The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy. And so, the psalmist is saying, you know, when God did this for us, the nations looked on and said, that's amazing. What an amazing God.

And I think that is what, or something of what is being said here at the end of Psalm 148, that as we demonstrate by our life and service and praise how great our God is, as we enjoy the benefits of His salvation and make that visible, then others look on and there's a kind of holy envy, a healthy desire to be part of that and to join with us in the praise of such a God.

[ 23 : 50 ] So, what does God expect of us? Well, certainly He expects us to praise Him. But I think He expects more of us. He expects us to be a people who draw others in to the praise of God.

I wonder, is that something that we're doing? Are we the cause for others to praise the Lord? Do others even know what God has done for us? That they might be amazed. A final thought that I just want to mention as we close.

As I contemplate this picture of universal praise that extends across the nations, really picking it up from verse 11 where it's speaking about people. So, let's not think about the heavens, let's not think about the created order and the snow and the hills and the stars, but just the people who are mentioned from verse 11 onwards.

As I look at that picture that's painted one thing that I'm struck by is the power of the gospel to break down barriers and unite the most unlikely into one family.

Notice there in verse 11, kings of the earth and all nations. So, all nations. Now, we only need to look around and see how nations are always at each other's throats. They're not united.

[ 25 : 03 ] There's enmity, there's conflict, there's strife. Kings vie against one another. You princes and all rulers on the earth, young men and maidens, old men and children.

So, you have this congregation of those who would normally be loggerheads. You have this disparity in terms of social class, in terms of demographics, children and old men, kings, the powerful and the weak, but all united in this one thing that is the praise of God.

There's this one bond, indeed, I think it's the only bond that can unite such disparate groups and it is this shared delight in the praise and service of God.

And we have a responsibility to make that happen in a small way where God has placed us. So, who are we? We are His people. We are His saints.

We are a people close to His heart. What has He done for us? Well, He's made Himself known to us and He's raised up a king, a savior for us.

[ 26 : 10 ] And what does He expect of us? That we would respond in grateful praise and not only be content with the praise we offer, but that it would be our concern that we would draw others in to join with us in His praise.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You that You are indeed a God who holds us close to Your heart. We thank You that we are precious to You.

We thank You that Your estimation of us is far greater than the estimation that we have for ourselves. You love us more than we love ourselves, even though we can be very self-consumed, yet our love does not come close to the depth and the richness and the quality of Your love for us. And we do thank You for that. We thank You for the very powerful ways in which You've demonstrated Your love for us and Your saving deeds on our behalf and the sending of Your Son, Jesus, to be our Savior.

Help us to respond in joyful, intelligent, conscious praise, but help us also to draw others in that they too might join with us in Your praise.

[ 27 : 24 ] And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.