

Psalm 148

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[0 : 0 0] Our God and our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the call that rings out through the centuries and through the millennia in the words that we have read. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. And we ask that we would respond as all creation, as all the cosmos responds to that call, to do that which is fitting, to acknowledge you and to praise you, each according to their nature and according to their calling. How much more are we to be those who respond in joy and gratitude to this great invitation to praise your high and your holy name. Help us to recognize that you are indeed the one who is exalted over all, that your splendor is above the earth and heavens. And we thank you very especially that we can recognize and understand in a great and a wonderful way that you're the God who has raised up for your people a horn of salvation, raised up for your people a king to rescue us and to bring the exiles home, who has raised up a king to save his people. And we thank you for that king, your own son, Jesus. And we pray that as we give some thought to all that you have done, all the good reasons that we are given to praise your name, that our response would indeed be to praise your name. Praise your name in song, but praise your name also by the lives that we live and the manner in which we would dedicate our lives to your service and to the furtherance of your purposes and the extending of your kingdom. We come before you and confess that we often fall short. We do not praise you as we ought. If we were to look back on the year that has closed, on how many occasions and in so many ways have we fallen short of granting to you and affording to you the praise that is your due. And we confess that and ask that you would forgive us. But we thank you that you are a God who gives us, indeed every day, gives us a new opportunity to seek to live the lives that we have been called to live, live the lives that we have been created to live, lives that would bring glory to your name.

For this is our great calling. This is our chief end to glorify you and to enjoy you forever. We pray that that would be true of us in great measure in this year that is beginning. Heavenly Father, we do pray that you would be with us in all our many and varied circumstances. We thank you that you are a God who responds to us and helps us at the point of our need. We have already sung of the manner in which you heal the brokenhearted and the lame and the weak, the cast down. And we thank you for that, for how we stand in such great need of a God who can deal with us wherever we are and whatever our circumstances might be. And they will be varied circumstances. But wherever we are, we pray that you would be the one, the one who knows us and who knows us as we really are, who knows us from the inside out, that you would be dealing gently and graciously with us and for us. Heavenly Father, we do commend to you the world in which we live, a world that is marked as it has ever been marked by conflict and violence and suffering. We pray for those who particularly suffer at this time or conscious of ongoing conflict and bloodshed in Syria and Iraq and beyond. We are made particularly conscious of the continuing troubles in Syria with the many hundreds, indeed thousands, who seek to escape, risking their very lives from their own country. We think of those refugees who have been rescued from the Mediterranean. And we pray for every effort made to provide for them. We know that they represent so many more who perhaps don't have the means even to consider such a perilous escape.

Lord, we do pray for that nation. We pray for your own people within it as they seek to continue to be a faithful witness for you. Heavenly Father, we do pray for others and we pray for the opportunities we have to serve you in this, your world. And this morning, very particularly, we commend to you those of our congregation who are in Addis Ababa. We thank you for the reports we've had of all that they've been able to do in this week that has passed. We thank you for the course that Jesse's been able to give and for the benefit that it has been to the pastors and church workers who have participated. And as we pray for Jesse, so we pray also for Luke and for Samuel and for Murdo and for John and for Donald. And pray your blessing on them and also the different folks that they have brought to our attention in their daily reports. And though we don't mention them by name, we commend them to your care and keeping. Also, we pray that you continue to grant them safety in all that they do and at the close of the week bring them home safely to us. Lord, we do thank you for this opportunity that you've extended not only to them but to us to be involved in this way in the work of the gospel in that country. Heavenly Father, we come closer to home and pray for our own congregation. We think of activities that will be commencing again following the Christmas break.

We think of the Sunday school as it begins again this morning and pray for the children and the Sunday school teachers and pray your blessing on them and the work that they do. We pray for schools as they commence their activities tomorrow. We pray for those of our congregation who are teachers or involved in one way or another in the work of our primary and secondary schools and pray that you would be with them and bless them. And indeed, so many who will be back to work tomorrow following a time of rest and we trust refreshment. We pray that as we work, we would acknowledge work to be a gift, a good gift that you have given to us and that we are called to work to your glory and to do everything that we do with an eye to and with a view to your glory. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would continue with us now as we turn to your word, to sing from it and to spend a moment pondering on what it has to say to us this morning. And all of these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to continue singing the closing verses of Psalm 147. We've sung through to verse 13 and we'll pick up our singing from verse 14 and sing on through to the end on page 193 of our psalm books and we'll sing these verses to the tune at Petersham. The Lord will grant you peace within the borders of your land and finest wheat. And finest wheat will fill your land and finest wheat will fill your fields from his sustaining hand. Singing on through to the end of the psalm and we'll stand to sing.

[7 : 36] The Lord will grant you peace within the borders of your land and finest wheat will fill your fields from his elect prayer. And...

ZANG EN MUZIEK The water is warm with love.

The frozen water started to melt and once again to flow. Though Jacob God defies his worm and makes his rotten stone, his heart advances, he reveals to Israel alone.

He has not dealt in such a way with any other race. To us alone he shows his cross.

O praise the Lord of praise. Why do you exist?

[9 : 54] Why does anything exist? What purpose do you serve? Or what purpose are you intended to serve? And as we're asking the big questions, let's not hold back.

What is the purpose of anything and everything? Indeed of the universe itself. Why does the universe exist?

The galaxies, the stars, our solar system, planet earth, the oceans and the mountain ranges. All creatures great and small.

You and me. Just what is the point of it all? Is there an answer to that question? And can we know what the answer is?

Well, the author of the psalm that we have read is in no doubt as to the answer to our question. You exist to praise God.

[10 : 57] The universe exists to praise God. The galaxies, the stars, the solar system, our planet, and every creature, every man, woman, and child exist to praise God.

That is our purpose. That is our reason for being. The psalm that we've read, Psalm 148, begins and ends with the psalmist's great concern and preoccupation.

His great call to the cosmos and everything in it. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. And take note, careful note, that the one to be praised is not some distant and possibly mercurial supreme being.

The one to be praised is the God with a name, the name by which he has made himself known, Yahweh. I am that I am.

This is where the psalm begins, and this is where the psalm ends. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. The message is clear, even by locating this great call at the beginning and at the end of the psalm.

[12 : 15] This is where everything begins and ends, in the God who is worthy of universal praise. But in between this great call with which the psalm begins and with which the psalm ends, the psalmist directs his call to praise in two distinct directions.

He calls the heavens. There in verse 1, praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise Him in the heights above. And he continues. So in that direction, he directs this call to praise.

He calls the heavens. But he also directs his call in another direction. He directs his call to the earth. Then in verse 7, praise the Lord from the earth.

And then he goes on to describe and speak of those who inhabit the earth or who form part of this planet that we belong to.

So the call is directed in these two directions. And this is what we want to do as we consider the psalm, to think of the two directions in which the call is made.

[13 : 29] Indeed, when we think of these two directions, the call to the heavens and the call to the earth, we're reminded that the very expression, heavens and earth, as it is used in the Scriptures, serves to describe and indeed to include the whole of the created order.

Everything bar the one who is separate and distinct from creation, the Creator Himself, the one whom this psalm also describes as above the earth and the heavens.

His splendor there in verse 13 is above the earth and the heavens. The heavens and the earth, all that there is, and yet there is one above all that there is.

The one who has created all that there is. So this call is directed to every nook and cranny of the cosmos.

And I imagine the cosmos has so many nooks and crannies. To every creature on the earth, and it is, of course, directed to you.

[14 : 32] The call to praise. Praise the Lord. Well, let's consider then the two directions in which the psalmist directs his call to praise. To the heavens and to the earth.

Then we'll begin in the order that the psalm presents the matter, the call to the heavens. Now, before we get into this, it is worth noting that the call to praise directed to both the heavens and the earth is presented in such a way that we can distinguish between those who are called and the reasons given for this call to praise.

In both halves of the psalm, you have this division between those who are called and then the reasons given for being called. So in the matter of the call to the heavens, those who are called are identified.

And then in verse 5, we read, for he commanded and they were created and it goes on. And that word for introduces the reasons why the heavens are to praise God.

And we find the same pattern in the second half of the psalm in the call to praise directed to the earth. Those who are called are identified and then we read in verse 13, for his name alone is exalted and the psalmist goes on.

[15 : 58] So as we look at this call to praise in both these directions, we'll then also divide between these two aspects that we find in the psalm. Those who are called and the reasons given for the call to praise.

So first of all then, with regard to the heavens, who are called to praise God in the heavens? The heavens is, to use simple language, but I hope helpful language, everything up there.

But everything up there can be subdivided into what we might call three realms. That is what we might call the highest heavens, to use the very language of the psalm.

Some suggest that this is to speak of heaven itself. But then there's also the stars or outer space that are made reference to the stars, the sun, and the moon.

And then also there is the skies, that which we see when we look up, looking immediately above us, the skies and indeed the clouds, the rain clouds, of which mention is made in the psalm also.

[17 : 09] Perhaps we could distinguish these three realms, for want of a better word, somewhat more lyrically, where the angels sing, where the stars shine, and where the clouds roam.

And the call is to each of these realms within the heavens to praise the Lord. And notice as we read this first part, this first half really, of the psalm, notice how the movement, if we can speak of the movement in the call, is from the animate to the inanimate, or certainly less animate.

The call first is directed to the angels. There in verse 2, praise Him, all His angels. Praise Him, all His heavenly hosts.

And that is a call that we can understand. It makes sense. Yes, of course, the angels are called to praise God. And we're given instances, examples of them doing precisely that.

We think of the holy, holy, holy of Isaiah chapter 6. We think of the glory to God in the highest at the beginning of Luke's gospel. The angels are called to praise the Lord.

[18 : 21] And that is what they do. And we are not surprised that that is so. But then we discover that the stars and the planets are also called to praise God.

And that's a little bit more difficult for us to get our heads around. What does that mean? What does that involve? The stars and the planets, the sun and the moon, also called to praise God.

And the clouds or the skies, likewise, are called to praise God. But how can they praise God?

Yes, the angels, conscious beings, we can understand how they can praise God. But the stars and the sun and the moon, how are they to praise God?

We might think, well, the language is stirring language, an evocative language, but does it actually make any sense? Now, to answer this question, how is it that these celestial bodies can praise God?

[19 : 24] To answer this question, we need to move on to the reasons given for praise that follow on from the word that introduces those reasons, the word for, there in verse 5.

Let them praise the name of the Lord for He commanded and they were created and then further reasons are given. So let's notice what the reasons given are.

And as we establish what the reasons given are that the heavens should praise God, I think it will help us to establish the manner in which they are to praise God.

So what are the reasons? Well, there in verse 5, from the second half of the verse, they are outlined for us. The first one given is that He created them. Indeed, not only that He created them, but we're told He commanded and they were created by His voice of sovereign authority.

He established them. He created them. And this is a reason why they ought to praise God. The angels and the stars and the sun and the moon, they are to praise God because God commanded and they were created.

[20 : 33] But we're told more. We're told there in verse 6, He set them in place forever and ever. He established where they were to be, indeed, what it is that they were to do.

And it continues, He gave a decree that will never pass away. The stars and the planets and the skies, leaving to one side the angels that it's more easy for us to understand the manner of their praise.

the stars and the planets and the skies are to praise God because they were created by God, because they are subject to God, and because they exist or function as directed by God.

This is very clearly established here by the psalmist. But note that in the reasons given to underpin and explain the call to praise, that is almost emerging with the matter of the manner in which praise is to be offered by the stars and the skies, the matter that is perhaps more difficult for us to understand.

In what sense are the reasons given merging with the manner of the praise to be granted? Well, the stars and the sun and the moon, they are to praise God by being what God created them to be.

[21 : 53] By the simple act of being what they were created to be, they praise God. They praise God by obeying and fulfilling their God-given function.

God established them by His decree forever and ever, and they submit to God's decree. They are obedient, submissive to God's decree for their very purpose and function and place in the heavens.

Obedience reigns. It's only on planet Earth that creatures exist to rebel against their creator, but that's another story. So in the heavens, what we might call inanimate celestial bodies, praise God.

They do so in their own God-appointed way, but they do praise God. It's important to be clear on this. The poetic language of the psalmist, and indeed, it is poetic language.

The fact that the psalmist is employing poetic language is not a reason to conclude that the psalmist is only suggesting, though no doubt beautifully, that if they could praise the Lord, the stars and the sun and the moon, if they could, then they would.

[23 : 12] He's saying more than that. He is saying that they are called to praise God, and they do actually praise God in the manner that is true to who they are and what they are, in the manner directed by God who has created them.

As we think of the manner in which they praise God by being, by submitting, by obeying, it's also true, though it's not prominent in this psalm, but we can note another related way in which they praise God.

They praise God by pointing to God and by revealing something of God to us. We know that that truth is prominent in other psalms.

We think of Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of His hands. In that manner also, though as I say not found so prominently in this psalm, the heavens praise God.

So the stars and the skies praise God by being, by obeying, by revealing their Creator. Is that it? Does that exhaust this matter of the manner in which they respond to the call to praise?

[24 : 26] I wonder, and it is just a matter of wondering, I wonder if there might be more that awaits a future day. Those who have studied this matter and studied how this psalm has been understood through the history of the church indicate to us that from as early as the 4th century, many have seen this psalm as a prophetic picture of the praise that will be given to God when the creation itself is freed from its present bondage as described by Paul in words that we read in Romans chapter 8.

Let's just remind ourselves of the particularly relevant words from verse 19. What does Paul say? The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed for the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought in to the glorious freedom of the children of God.

And some in the light of that reality, the language of Paul and that theological reality described for us in the Bible, some wonder whether this psalm is describing a future day when creation itself will enjoy that redemption that Paul speaks of.

Now I'm not persuaded that that is so regarding this psalm but you know I'm sure as we think and as we look forward to the new heavens and the new earth here in this psalm the heavens are called to praise God the earth is called to praise God and we know how in the Bible there is this prominent eschatological theme as we await the new heavens and the new earth and I'm sure there will be surprises for God's people in the new heavens and in the new earth.

Maybe in the words of Job the morning stars really will sing together and as the prophet Isaiah envisions the mountains and hills will burst into song before us and the trees and the trees of the field really will clap their hands.

[26 : 37] But we need to move on to the call to praise the Lord that is directed to the earth. Having considered briefly the call directed to the heavens let's now turn to how this call to praise the Lord is also directed to the earth.

And again as we've done in considering the call to the heavens we can distinguish between those who are called to praise and the reasons given for this call. Who then on earth are called to praise?

Well in the call to the heavens that we've just noted the movement if indeed we can detect some kind of movement the movement was from the animate the angels to the inanimate or the less animate the stars and the skies but the call to the earth moves in the opposite direction from the inanimate or less animate to the animate to men and women and boys and girls to you and me.

It begins with this call to the great sea creatures and the ocean depths there in verse 7 praise the Lord from the earth and who are to praise Him you great sea creatures and all ocean depths.

The psalmist begins with that which was the source of mystery and perhaps for many of his readers even terror and yet the psalmist assures his readers as he assures us that such creatures should not be feared for their power to destroy but admired for their power to praise the great sea creatures and the ocean depths and the psalmist goes on lightning and hail snow and clouds stormy winds what do they do?

[28 : 17] How do they praise God? Well they praise God by doing His bidding they who do His bidding they are what they were created to be they do what they were intended to do they do that which God commands them to do they obey and submit to their creator and in this manner by being who they were intended to be and doing what they are intended to do they praise their God mountains and all hills fruit trees and all cedars wild animals and all cattle the list clearly is not intended to be exhaustive making mention of everything but certainly it's intended to be representative representing everything and the repeated use of the word all only serves to emphasize this great concern of the psalmist that none are excluded from this great call to praise God all the cedar trees let's just focus in on the cedar trees of the many things that we could focus in on all of them each and every cedar tree the world over without exception what about the cattle yes all the cattle the cattle on a thousand hills not only belongs to God as we discover in another psalm but is called to praise a God small creatures the word there can be translated creeping creatures we think of little insects flying birds even the smallest wee beastie is included in the call to praise but as we move from the less animate to the animate or conscious the call is now directed to human beings notice what the psalmist goes on to speak of in verse 11 kings of the earth and all nations you princes and all rulers on earth the great and the good certainly the great and the significant kings and princes and rulers from every nation and every land they are called to praise

God but then immediately in a manner that is so democratic you might say the psalmist then makes sure that none be in any way unclear that also included in the call are young men and maidens old men and children the weak and the seemingly insignificant they too each and every one are called to praise God young men and maidens old men and children we describe them as insignificant in the eyes of the world maybe they are insignificant but it's telling to just ponder on this that just as kings gain their significance ultimately in praising God so also those deemed insignificant gain significance as they praise the Lord and this is true for you and me we gain significance we discover our meaning and our purpose as we praise the Lord for that is what we have been created for and so the telling question and the urgent question that needs to be posed and that you need to pose is well is that what

I am doing do I praise the Lord do I do that for which I have been created one writer captures the spirit of the call to great and small in words that I quote kings kings are more kingly when they cast their crowns before him youth is purest when lived in remembrance of the creator the maiden's voice is never so sweet as in hymns to Jehovah the memories and feebleness of age are hallowed and strengthened by recognition of the God who can renew failing energy and soothe sad remembrances who are called to praise on earth all are called all are called but then the psalmist as he has done previously in the call to the heavens he also he in the call to the earth gives us reasons why we are to praise the Lord and the reasons are found in verse 13 and in what follows let them praise the name of the Lord for again introducing the reasons for and what are the reasons well we read for his name alone is exalted his name his name

Yahweh his name that represents who he is and all that he is his name his being his person alone is exalted the name of the Lord the name that is above every name the only name before whom it is fitting and right to bow down in humble praise why are we to praise the Lord for his name is exalted why else are we to praise the Lord for his splendor is above the earth and the heavens yes above the earth and the heavens the one who is distinct from the earth and the heavens for he is the one who has created them above his splendor above the earth and the heavens and the psalmist continues in outlining for us the reasons for praise in verse 14 and in verse 14 he identifies a further reason for God's people very particularly moving beyond the mountains and the hills and the animals and all those who are mentioned thinking particularly of God's people the reasons given that we might praise the Lord what does he say that in verse 14 he is raised up for his people yes for his people he has raised up for his people a horn now what does that mean he has raised up for his people a horn well a horn was a symbol of strength and here it seems that the reference is to a king but not just any king but a king worthy of praise notice what the psalmist tellingly declares concerning the one raised up he has raised up for his people a horn the praise of all his saints so this horn this king that God would raise up was one worthy of praise who is this king that God raises up for his people while he is king Jesus you don't need to take my word for it listen to

Zechariah in Luke chapter 1 and reading from verse 68 Zechariah celebrates the miracle of the impending birth of his own son but even more the impending arrival of Messiah Jesus what does Zechariah sing 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 his holy prophets of long ago salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant the oath he swore to our father Abraham to rescue us from the hand of our enemies and to enable us to serve him without fear and holiness and righteousness before him all our days God has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant

[36 : 19] David so we praise God as creation points to and reveals his power and beauty and majesty but we praise God most wonderfully as we see Jesus the eternal son of God and our savior God's horn of salvation raised up for us but there is a final and beautiful reason to praise God a reason to be found in the manner his people are described let's read verse 14 he has raised up for his people a horn the praise of all his saints of Israel the people close to his heart the people close to his heart that is how we are described the people close to God's heart those near to God those near to the one who is above the heavens and the earth how can that be that the one who is above the heavens and the earth yet the one who is near to his people we near to his heart and that reality and that glorious reality is surely another wonderful reason that we might praise him that we are so described the people close to his heart we are close to his heart that is why the father raised up

Jesus that is why the father raised him up even to the accursed cross he did so because we are close to his heart and that we might be close to his heart and what more precious reason could we have to praise him so we have many and certainly sufficient reasons to praise the lord but how are we his people to praise the lord well like the stars above and the creeping creatures below they can be our teachers in this matter we can praise god by being what god has created us to be the stars praise god by being what they were created to be and we are to praise god by being what we have been created to be we have been created that we might be sons and daughters those created in his image and likeness that we would glorify him as we reflect that image and likeness that is what we are to be and as we are that so we praise god and again with the stars and even the creeping creatures we praise god by obeying our creator by submitting to his purposes for us in loving and joyful service in the place and in the way that has been appointed for us and as those close to his heart as we are and as we obey there is a song in our hearts and on our lips as we sing hallelujah praise the lord let's pray heavenly father we do thank you that we are indeed greatly honored and dignified by this call that is directed to us that we would praise you the living and true god we thank you that in discovering this call and in responding to this call we become that which we have been created for we thank you that in the praise of god we discover our meaning and our purpose in this world we pray that you would help us to respond as we are that it would be for us a delightful thing to respond joyfully and humbly to this call to praise you that we would praise you by being what we are intended to be by living lives that bring glory to your name that we would praise you as we obey you and submit to your will and purpose for us that we would praise you in song as we make use even of the words that you have given us in this psalm and beyond that we would be a people who delights in the praise of god and these things we ask amen well let's sing this psalm that we've been giving some thought to psalm 148 we'll sing in the scottish psalter on page 449 the second version of the psalm and we'll sing the whole of the psalm we'll sing to the tune saint john the lord of heaven confess on high his glory raise him let all angels bless him all his armies praise him glorify sun moon and stars ye higher spheres and cloudy sky oh let god's name be praised the final stanza above both earth and sky for he his saints hath raised and set their horn on high even those that be of

Israel's race near to his grace the lord praise he let's stand to sing the whole of this psalm the Lord of them are blessed on high his glory is in that all angels blessed in all his armies praise in glory by sun moon and sun he hires in the holy sky from God your wings are in their for famous name you all created where when he the word must stay and from the place where faced you be by his degree you cannot pass praise

God from them below in dragons and these I will will cause wind and storm earth in command he keys praise he his name his great and small trees low and tall his world and tail all things that free for fight he takes here over throne all princes be or high both men and virgins young he young and old his soul his name for how to strength to live and strong oh let those name be praise above both earth and sky for he is safe of praise and send them on high he knows that beyond his place near to his place the

Lord praise you now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always Amen