

The universal orchestra

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[0 : 01] Well, can I welcome us to this lunchtime Bible talk, and we come today to the last in this short series of five studies of the Hallel, the Praise Psalms at the end of the book, and our study today is Psalm 150, the last psalm. You will find that on page 526.

Well, before I read it, I'm going to read Psalm 1, which you'll find on page, you can either look it up or just listen, but it's on page 445. When you're studying a book, or a section of a book, it's very often a good idea to look at the bookends, how it begins and how it ends, which often give you a handle on the whole book.

So before we read Psalm 150, we'll read Psalm 1. Psalm has said, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

[1 : 35] For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish. And now simply jump over to Psalm 150.

A big jump on page 526. And I'll explain in a moment or two why I've read the first Psalm as well. Psalm 150 on page 526.

Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary. Praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his mighty deeds. Praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him with trumpet sound. Praise him with lute and harp. Praise him with timbre and indents. Praise him with strings and pipe. Praise him with sounding cymbals.

Praise him with loud clashing cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Amen. That is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 33] Let's have a moment of prayer. Lord God, how we praise you for your goodness. We meet on this beautiful summer day. A reminder of your ancient promise.

That as long as the earth remains, summer and winter, seed time and harvest will never cease. A reminder that you are the God of the covenant. Who keeps your promises.

Who does not break them. And does not grow weary. And on a beautiful day like this, we thank you for this anticipation of the renewed creation. When the winter of evil and sin and death will be gone. And the high midsummer pumps of the new creation will shine all around us. As we look once again at these psalms. Warm our hearts.

Stretch our minds. And give us indeed the willingness to praise you. Praise the one who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[3 : 31] And we thank you for this. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. So, there you have it.

The psalm begins with the righteous prosper and are blessed. And it ends with, because of that, we can praise. And of course, when you put it that way, instantly the yes buts begin to arise.

We know very well that righteous don't always prosper in this world. We know very well there are times when it's very, very difficult to praise. But the reason these two psalms are there as bookends is because there are 148 other psalms in between.

Which deal with the yes buts. Without contradicting the fact that in the end, in the eternity the righteous will be blessed. And in the end, all will be praised.

They deal with the big questions. The yes buts. They deal with the mystery of life. They deal with suffering. They deal with questions. Big questions.

[4 : 41] And let me just give you a few examples. We could take the rest of the time actually going through this. But I want to give you examples. How is it possible to praise the Lord and to believe we are blessed in times of depression and doubt?

Well, Psalms 77 and 88 are the psalms for those times. Telling us that even in the darkest pitch, the Lord is still with us.

What about when the wicked prosper? Read Psalms 73. The psalmist says, I was resentful. I was bitter because the wicked were prospering.

Implication being I wasn't. And look at what he has to say. What happens when we sin dreadfully? Read Psalm 51.

David's pouring out of his confession as after the Bathsheba Uriah incident. What happens when they're afraid of death? Read Psalm 16 with its glorious words.

[5 : 47] You will not leave my soul in jail. And afterwards, you'll receive me into glory. What about when we're afraid of the future? Read Psalm 46.

God is our refuge and strength. And even if the mountains fall into the sea, he'll still be with us. What if we're in an experience like the ancient people of God in exile?

Read Psalms like Psalm 74, for example. You see, obedience will always be painful. There will always be struggle. There will always be difficulties.

But in the end, the way of righteousness ends in life. And in the end, there will be praise. And so in Psalm 150, the psalmist is summoning the universal orchestra.

And in this, what's essentially a doxology which ends the psalms. Spurgeon, in his great commentary in the psalms, speaks about it as a mountain peak soaring upwards into the blue heavens.

[6 : 52] So let's look for a moment at how this final psalm develops. It's a summing up and a rounding off. Now, at first sight, there might not seem to be very much to say about this psalm.

Remember, those of you who were here a few weeks ago, remember I said to you that many people, when they come to this, think it's full of quotations. The point is, these last psalms are summing up Israel's faith.

As the psalmist, far more than one writer, have worked through periods of doubt, periods of difficulty, and periods of rejoicing as well. There are psalms which are full of rejoicing, full of blessing, full of thanksgiving.

Having worked through these, then clearly, in these last psalms, he's bringing them all together. And first of all, in verse 1, there is a place to praise.

And where is that place? The place is the whole universe, in fact, both on earth and in heaven. Praise God in his sanctuary. Praise God in his earthly temple.

[7 : 58] Now, that's not just places of worship, if you want to call them that. That's wherever we are. Wherever we are, the earth, but I'm not taking another psalm, Psalm 24, the earth is the Lord's.

And everything in it. The people and those who live there. The temple sanctuary. The place where God meets with his people. Wonderfully rich theme.

Traced through the whole of scripture. From Eden, where God can... The garden temple, where he comes down to meet his people. Until the temple, where heaven and earth unite.

At the end of the book of Revelation. But also, the true temple is Christ himself. It is Christ in whom we worship. It's Christ whom we worship, but we also worship with him.

If you like, he is the choir master, as well as the object of worship. And as we worship him, he leads our praises. Useful, by the way, to read some of the psalms in that light.

[9 : 00] And see how much depth there is. So where do we praise God? We praise him on earth. And where else is God praised? Praise him in his mighty heavens.

With angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. We magnify your holy name, says Cranmer's prayer book. And even here on earth, that is true.

When we worship on earth, even if it's a very small and very apparently insignificant group of people. They're never worshipping alone.

It's with the whole company of heaven. The angels, the archangels. And with a far vaster number of God's people who are now with him. After all, at any given time, whenever that time may be.

The vast majority of God's people have now gone to be with him. And we join in their worship. And in the end, the whole creation will be filled with praise. When heaven and earth are reunited, as John says in Revelation.

[10:00] The holy city coming down out of God from heaven. So there's a place to praise. Secondly, there is a reason for praise. Praise is never just emotion.

Very important there is emotion, of course, there. But there are reasons for praising. And in this final psalm, these two great reasons for praise, which run through the whole Bible.

We praise him because he is the creator and savior. Verse 2. Praise him for his mighty deeds. The mighty deed by which he made the heavens and earth. The mighty deed by which he brought his people out of Egypt.

In Genesis 1 and 2, he creates the heavens and the earth in all their vast array. And then he creates a particular place, a garden, where he meets with his people.

We're hardly there when disaster strikes. The week when everything went right is followed by the day when everything went wrong. And then in Genesis 3, the savior is announced, the serpent crusher, who will restore creation and redeem his people.

[11:11] And in the Exodus story, both of these belong together. The Exodus is not just an event in history. It's an event where God begins a new creation.

And when Christ comes, this is the kind of language that's used, the language of the new creation. And this culminates in the twin songs in Revelation 4 and 5, where the heavenly hosts bless the creator and bless the savior.

Now, that will happen in the end, but it's happening already. It's a reality at this very moment. And it is a fact, if you read the history of the church, that at times when the spirit of God has been moving, there is a groundswell of song.

Great praise songs are written. I've been reading a bit recently about the 18th century revival, associated especially with George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers, John the preacher and Charles the hymn writer.

And Charles was converted before John. Actually, they were both brought up very piously. They were both religious. But it was later they experienced conversion.

[12:28] And Charles was converted first. And he and a number of friends prayed for John. And when John was converted, he suggested to his friends who had been with him, let's go around and see Charles and tell him the good news.

And when they went to see Charles, Charles said, I've just written a hymn which we might like to sing together. And probably for the very first time, they sang together those words which Christians have loved ever since.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Can you imagine the joy in their hearts, in their voices, they sang, No condemnation now I dread.

Jesus and all in him is mine. And this was a sign of the Spirit of God moving. And so many of our powerful and fine hymns come from the pen of Charles Wesley.

By the way, I'm not denigrating contemporary hymns. There are great contemporary hymns as well. Wesley wrote 7,000 hymns. We don't sing all 7,000. Some of them are much better than others.

[13:32] But the ones I've survived are glorious. And some of the modern stuff, How Deep the Father's Love for Us and in Christ Alone, These are worthy to stand alongside the great Methodist hymns and so on.

We must compare like with like. And because there's a lot of drivel written in the 18th century, As well as in the 20th and 21st century. So, praise him for what he has done.

Praise him for who he is. At the end of the verse, Praise him according to his excellent greatness. And of course now, Since Christ has come, We can see more clearly who he is.

God incarnate. God living, dying, risen, ascended, And coming again. It's not that we praise God more worthily than our, Than his Old Testament people did.

So, we're at a different stage in salvation history. And many of the events to which they looked forward are behind us. But the event to which the whole creation moves is still ahead of us, As it was ahead of them.

[14:38] So, there's a place to praise him. The whole universe. There's a reason to praise him. There's a reason to praise him. There's a reason to praise him. There's a reason to praise him. There's a reason to praise him. There's a reason to praise him. What he has done. And finally, verses 3 to 5, There is a way to praise him.

Now, this develops the previous Psalm. 148 verse, 49, sorry, verse 3, Let them praise his name with dancing, Making melody to him with timbre and lyre.

This is not about musical preferences. It's not about orders of service. I'm not saying that anything goes. But, over the years, I've been at very many different kinds of services, And have found that when the Spirit is present, When people's hearts are touched, Then God is truly glorified. It's not a particular style. And once again, the range of instruments here suggests a range of experience. The trumpet. This sounded and announced the year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. In the desert wanderings, it announced it was time to strike camp and move on to the next resting place. And Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4, That the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God will herald his coming at the end of time.

[15:57] So, the trumpet sound is something that points to the final day, Points to the great festivals. The harp is particularly associated with David.

After all, the great king, who was also the great Samist, He didn't write all the Psalms, But very many of the Psalms, And some of the greatest, one of which we'll sing in a few moments, Are from the pen of David.

And so, you see how these instruments are not just a random collection. The psalmist is thinking about moments in life.

The tambourine and dance, as I said last week, Associated with Miriam's song at the Exodus, When they crossed the Red Sea. The strings and pipes are probably more everyday instruments. Going back to their invention in Genesis 4, When Jobal was the first of those who invented the lyre and the pipes and so on.

[17:02] So, we've got the blessings here. I wouldn't press this too far, though. I mean, you can sometimes over-interpret things, And what you end up with sounds very impressive, But maybe the psalmist would say with great astonishment, I don't know where you got that.

That certainly wasn't in my mind. But anyway, there you are. And of course, the exuberance of the symbols. That doesn't mean, in order to please God, We've got to make a lot of noise.

Sometimes, in some Christian circles, They think God is more glorified to make a lot of noise. It does suggest the exuberance, the joyfulness. The whole orchestra, which is summoned to praise the Lord.

All the notes, bright notes, solemn notes, deep notes, and gentle notes, To the God who calls us to be his own. And the whole world is called, Let everything that has breath.

As we saw back in Psalm 147, And particularly, and 148, The whole of the created order joins to praise God.

[18:12] Everything that God has created is summoned to praise him. No voice is to remain silent. No heart is to remain unmoved. And the hallelujah, which ends the psalm, Is really a summing up of everything that's gone before.

Think of Psalm 1 once again for a moment. On that day, when everything is praise, Those who have walked in the way of righteousness Will realize that they had walked in the right way.

You see, at the moment, it's not at all obvious, is it? As we look at the world, as we look at our communities, Indeed, as we look into our own hearts, It's not at all obvious that the Lord reigns. It's not at all obvious that he is moving things towards the kingdom. But, our psalmist is telling us, In the end, all will be well, All manner of things will be well, And all will be praise.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, you are worthy to be praised. You're worthy to be praised because of who you are, Because of what you have done, Because of your mighty deeds, And because of your care, And detailed attention in every part of our lives.

[19:29] So help us to praise you, Not just with our lips, But with our lives. And help us, indeed, To be more like the, Our Lord and Savior, Who has called us to be his own people.

We ask this in his name. Amen.