



THE IMPERATIVES OF GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

PSALM 150

By: H.B. Charles, Jr.



SERMON MANUSCRIPT

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On one particular Sunday over a century ago, many curious seekers went to hear Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York, to hear the its famous pastor, Henry Ward Beecher. They were disappointed to discover that Henry's less prominent brother, Thomas K. Beecher, was filling the pulpit for him that day. When the lesser-known Beecher appeared in the pulpit, many in the crowd got up and headed for the doors. Sensing their disappointment, Thomas raised his hand to catch their attention. Those departing the service stopped, and Thomas said, "All those who came here to this morning to worship Henry Ward Beecher may withdraw from the church, but all who came to worship God may remain." That arresting statement jolted the people to their senses, and many who were leaving returned to their pews. This call to focus on the essence of worship, rather than the place, leaders, or form, is the message of this closing psalm of the Hebrew hymnbook.

In the book of Psalms, the various psalmists face all of life's vicissitudes. There are ups-and-downs, highs-and-lows, victory-and-defeat, joy-and-sorrow, doubt-and-confidence. But when you get to the end of the book of Psalms, the storms cease, the clouds lift, and the sun shines. And as darkness gives way to light, life's ultimate priority comes into view. And this ultimate priority is stated with an imperative: "Praise the Lord!" It's two words in Hebrew: *halal*, which means to praise or boast; and *Yah*, – a shortened form of Jehovah – which is the proper name of the one true God. Joined together. The translation is "HALLELUJAH" or "PRAISE THE LORD." Psalms 146-150 all begin and conclude with this command to praise the Lord. But the imperative of worship is most emphatic in this closing psalm, where we are commanded to praise God thirteen times in six short verses. In fact, the command to praise God begins every line of this psalm, except verse 6a that says, "*Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.*"

The Psalms begins in Psalm 1 with God blessing man. But it ends here with man blessing God. And Psalm 150 is so preoccupied with commands to praise the Lord that there is no place in this psalm that directly mentions the worshipers who receive these commands. Verses 3-5 record the most detailed list of musical instruments in scripture. Yet the worshipers who are to play these instruments are not mentioned. The worshipers are just lumped together in verse 6 with every other living thing God has created. This repeated emphasis on God as the Subject and Object of wor-

ship, and the total absence of any reference to any human being or earthly group, is divinely intended to confront us with the most essential principle of worship: God is the centerpiece of true worship. SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE put it this way: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." God is the centerpiece of true worship. And Psalm 150 orders us to focus on the essence of worship, rather than the leader, setting, or form, as it teaches us four ways in which God orders worship.

I. GOD ORDERS THE PLACE OF WORSHIP.

The first imperatives of this psalm address the matter of where God should be worshiped. Verse 1 say: "*Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!*" The noun *sanctuary*, which denotes apartness, holiness, or sacredness, refers to the holy presence of God that dwelt in the meeting place. The Jews viewed the temple as the earthly place of communion with God – his sanctuary. So the psalm commands that God be worshiped in his sanctuary. But he also commands us to worship God in his mighty heavens. According to Genesis 1:6-8, the heavens or firmament was created on the second day of creation to separate the waters above the earth from the waters below the earth. Genesis 1:14-19 tell us that on the fourth day of creation God placed lights in the heavens to divide the day from the night and to give light to the earth. The heavens is the expanse of space where the sun, moon, and stars dwell. And Psalm 150 says that God is to be worshiped in his in his mighty heavens, as well as in his sanctuary. These two poetic phrases teach us that God is to be worshiped in all of his creation. Literally, God is to be praised everywhere. There is no place where worship is out of place. Praise God on earth and in heaven. Praise God locally and universally. Praise God in the temple and everywhere else. Wherever you are, praise the Lord.

In John 4, Jesus rested at Jacob's well, as his disciples went into the city to buy food. When a Samaritan woman approached the well to draw water, Jesus asked her for water, which poured alcohol on the open sore of racial tension between Jews and Samaritans. But Jesus wasn't done. "Go get your husband," he ordered the woman. "I'm not married," she answered. "You're absolutely right!" Jesus confirmed. "You have been through five failed marriages, and you are not sleeping with someone else's husband." What a disturbing conversation, especially when you consider that it is the context of one of the most important passages on worship in scripture. God in his infinite wisdom

uses this conversation between Jesus and this loose woman to teach us about worship. And the lesson he teaches is that worship is about real life. It is not a mythical interlude in a week of reality. Worship is about real-life issues of water, racism, and adultery. And Jesus makes this clear when he answers the Samaritan woman's question about the proper place of worship. In John 4:21, Jesus tells the woman, *"The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will your worship the Father."* And in John 4:23-24 he says: *"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."*

Praise the Lord wherever you are! Hebrews 13:15 puts it this way: *"Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."* The word continually literally means "through it all." We are to praise God through it all. Psalm 137 is a song of lament by the Jews who were conquered and captured by the Babylonians. They had sat down by the Euphrates River, hung their musical instruments on the trees, and wept. So the Babylonians mocked them and taunted them to sing songs of praise. And the Jews responded by asking, "How can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" But that is never to be the question of the born again Christ-follower. We know that no land is strange to God. So we give him praise through it all.

- Noah worshiped God in an ark of gopher wood.
- Abraham worshiped God on a mountain.
- Moses worshiped God on the backside of a deserted place.
- Job worshiped God on a heap of ashes.
- David worshiped God in a cave.
- Solomon worshiped God in the temple.
- Daniel worshiped God in a den of lions.
- The three Hebrew boys worshiped God in a fiery furnace.
- Jonah worshiped God in the belly of a fish.
- Paul and Silas worshiped God while chained in prison.
- John worshiped God on a deserted island.

And we are to worship God everywhere, wherever, and through it all.

II. GOD ORDERS THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIP.

After addressing the issue of where we worship in verse 1, verse 2 tells us why we should worship God: *"Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness."* This verse reminds us that the fundamental, primary, and overall reason why we worship God is because God is worthy of our worship. Yes, God demands our praise. But if we were never commanded to praise the Lord, we would still be morally obligated to do it, because God deserves our praise.

A. GOD DESERVES OUR PRAISE BECAUSE OF WHAT HE HAS DONE.

Verse 1c describes the heavens above as mighty. But Psalm 19:1 says: *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."* The fact that hanging the sun, moon, and stars was just handiwork to God demonstrates how mighty and glorious he is. So whenever we look up, we should praise God. But Psalm 150:2a: *"Praise him for his mighty deeds."* So we also find reasons to praise God when we look around. The mighty acts of God that surround us call on us to give genuine and grateful praise to God. We should praise him for what he has done. Now, the Old Testament Jews who read these words would immediately think of God's deliverance, provisions, and faithfulness to Israel. And indeed God's dealings with Israel repeatedly demonstrate his mighty power. However, as Christians, we must read this Old Testament text with New Testament eyes. So when we read of the mighty acts of God, we immediately think of the virgin birth, virtuous life, vicarious death, victorious resurrection, and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ. We worship God as God in three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – a blessed Trinity. We praise God for what he has done for us through Jesus Christ our Lord. We thank God for Jesus.

1 Corinthians 15:56-57 says, *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* Ephesians 1:3-4 says, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him."* And 2 Corinthians 9:15 says, *"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"*

Think about it.

- Jesus stood before God with all our sin upon him so that we, through faith, might stand before God with none of our sin on us.
- He who was righteous was judged before God as unrighteous, that we who are unrighteous could be judged before God as righteous.
- He was made for us all that God must judge and, by faith, we are made in him all that God cannot judge.
- At Calvary, Jesus paid a debt he did not owe because you owed a debt that you could not pay.
- On the cross, God treated Jesus as if he had committed all of our sins so that he could treat us as if we had practiced all of the righteousness of Christ.

MY SIN – O, THE BLISS OF THIS GLORIOUS THOUGHT
 MY SIN – NOT IN PART, BUT THE WHOLE
 IS NAILED TO THE CROSS AND I BEAR IT NO MORE
 PRAISE THE LORD, PRAISE THE LORD, O MY SOUL!

B. GOD DESERVES OUR PRAISE BECAUSE OF WHO HE IS.

Verse 2b says: *“Praise him according to his excellent greatness.”* Excellent greatness refers to the nature, person, and character of God, independent of any and all of his mighty deeds. God deserves to be praised just because of who he is. God is worthy of our worship because he alone is God. We are to praise God in a manner that honors the surpassing greatness of his holy name. In the third century, THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH wrote: “For in glory he is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivaled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable.” Let me bottom-line that for you: God is great! Psalm 145:3 says, *“Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.”* John 10:28-29 says, *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater*

than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” And 1 John 4:4 says, *“Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”*

Our God is a great God. And we should praise him for his excellent greatness. In fact, the text says, *“Praise him according to his excellent greatness.”* That is, praise him in agreement with, to the degree of, and in proportion with his greatness. We should worship God in a manner that honors his eternal, exclusive, infinite, sovereign, and unchanging greatness. This is what it means to give God the highest praise. We often say that “Hallelujah” is the highest praise. But that is not what the Bible teaches. And if the Bible did say that it would pervert the worship of God by permitting unsaved, sinful, and wicked people to give God the highest praise just by saying the right words. A.W. TOZER was right when he said that what comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you. It’s also the most important thing in worship. But the sad indictment is that many of us come to church and celebrate God’s greatness on the Lord’s Day, but we live every other day as if the circumstances of life are greater than God. MANUEL SCOTT, JR. says: “We come to church and shout about a dynamite God, but then we go home to live firecracker lives.” But God receives the highest praise when those of us who worship his greatness also walk in his greatness. The Lord is magnified and glorified when our lips, lives, and loves declare that...

- God is greater than our problems.
- God is greater than our sickness.
- God is greater than our enemies.
- God is greater than our needs.
- God is greater than our desires.

III. GOD ORDERS THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP.

In verse 1, God tells us where to worship him. In verse 2, God tells us why we should worship him. And in verses 3-5, God tells us how to worship him: *“Praise him with the trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals.”* Here God orders the practice of worship. And the first thing we learn from this detailed

list of musical instruments is that our worship is meant to please God, not us.

I was scheduled to preach a statewide convention of pastors. Several weeks before the meeting, one of my professors, Dr. James Borror, preached for me. He saw the announcement in the bulletin. And we began talking about the challenge of preaching to preachers. I told him about the first time I have to preach before a large group of pastors. An older pastor advised me to minister to the congregation, rather than trying to impress the pastors. I told Prof that how I had held on to that advice through the years and that I would carry it in to the convention meeting. In his gentle way, Dr. Borror replied, “I have a slightly different way of viewing those type of settings. I don’t focus on the pastors or the congregation. I just remember that I am called to preach to an audience of one. The only one I should be seeking to please in my preaching is God.”

I was rebuked that day. And when I think about that conversation, I am reminded how our thoughts about worship can so easily become irreverent, man-centered, narcissistic, unbiblical, and outright sinful. But genuine worship seeks to exalt the unequalled greatness of God, rather than meet our needs, satisfy our tastes, or accomplish our agenda. God is the SUBJECT of worship, which means our worship is about him. But God is also the OBJECT of worship, which means our worship is for him. Every aspect of our worship – the music, the scripture readings, the prayers, the music, the sermon, and even the offering – is to be rendered as unto the Lord.

God orders the practice of worship. And Psalm 150 teaches us that God likes to be praised with music. God likes orchestra music. God likes instrumental music. God likes vocal music. God likes beautiful music. God likes loud music. God likes energetic music. God even likes music you can dance to! God likes music. But I don’t believe that’s the lesson of the text. Don’t let anybody bluff you; God does not like all music. And the fact that the conjunction with is used six times on verses 3-5 reminds us that music itself is not worship. It is accompaniment to worship. In other words, as God is listening to the music, he’s also looking at the heart. That’s why Ephesians 5:19 mentions spiritual singing as an evidence of Spirit-infilling. So the point of the text is not found the musical instruments themselves. It’s

found in the implications of them. In mentioning everything from a shepherd’s horn to loud, clanging cymbals, God is ordering worship that is joyous, uninhibited, and whole-hearted. Think about it.

- You can’t get distracted in worship with the commanding sounds of a trumpet shouting at you.
- You can’t play a harp with indifference.
- You can’t be cool, sophisticated, and dignified while playing a tambourine and jumping around in dance.
- You can’t get bored in worship with stringed instruments of all sorts capturing every note and cord in the world of music.
- You can’t go to sleep with someone constantly clanging loud cymbals in your ears.

So God lists these musical instruments – from winds, to strings, to percussions – as a way of commanding us to give him total praise. We should praise God by all means. Our minds, our bodies, our voices, our talents, our emotions, our wills – all that we are and all that we have should be fully offered to the Lord as a sacrifice of praise.

Mark 14:3-9 tells of a woman who crashed a party Jesus was attending. She was carrying a bottle of spikenard, a rare perfume that that was worthy 300 denarii. A denarius was the daily wage of the typical agricultural worker in the Ancient Near East. At the end of the year, their gross income was about 300 denarii. So this woman crashes the party with a bottle of perfume that was worth what most men made in a year. But she broke the bottle and began to anoint the head of Jesus with the perfume. And some who were present said “What a waste!” And I declare that the world still says “What a waste!” when they see those who love Jesus express their devotion to him. Even carnal minded church folk will say, “What a waste!” Now, the world doesn’t think it’s a waste to get excited about music, money, cars, houses, sex, or the American flag. But if you get excited about Jesus, someone will say, “What a waste.” But I love how Jesus responded: “*Let her alone. She has done a good work for me.*” He even promised that her devotion would be memorialized wherever the Gospel is preached. The Lord remembers of those who express their devotion to him freely, extravagantly, and sacrificially. So pour it on! I agree with BISHOP HANDLEY MOULE, who said, “I would rather tone down a fanatic than resurrect a corpse.” So don’t worry about what others may think. If God is your Father, Jesus your Lord, and the Spirit your guide, then pour on the praise.

IV. GOD ORDERS THE PARTICIPANTS OF WORSHIP.

In verse, God tells us where to worship. In verse 2, God tells us why we should worship. In verse 3-5, God tells us how to worship. And in verse 6, God tells us who should worship. Now that the auditorium is secured, the occasion is established, and the instruments prepared, God selects a choir. Here are his criteria: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!” This liberal policy for choir membership makes sense. After all, things that don’t have breath praise the Lord. Psalm 148:7-9 says: *“Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, sown and mist, stormy win fulfilling word. Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars!”* And in describing the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, the crowds rejoiced and praised God with a loud voice for the mighty works of Jesus, crying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” The Pharisees tried to get Jesus to rebuke the crowds. Luke 19:40 says: *“He answered, ‘I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.’”* So it is only fitting that God would be praised by everything that breathes. Here the point.

- God, the Creator and Ruler of the world, deserves the praises of everything and everyone.
- God’s glory fills the universes. So his praise should do no less.
- Every living thing should sing praises to the Lord.
- Our worships should not be confined to church service. But while we breathe, we should praise.
- We should fill the whole world with the praises of God.

Let me close by saying that our responsibility to praise God is also our opportunity to praise God. That is, you don’t need a big house, new car, fancy clothes, or good circumstances to praise God. If you are breathing, you have sufficient reason to praise the Lord. The fact that you are still here means God is worthy to be praised. So praise him no matter what.

BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE;
O WHAT A FORETASTE OF GLORY DIVINE!
HEIR OF SALVATION, PURCHASE OF GOD,
BORN OF HIS SPIRIT, WASHED IN HIS BLOOD.

THIS IS MY STORY; THIS IS MY SONG
PRAISING MY SAVIOR ALL THE DAY LONG.