

Praising Creatively (Psalm 150)

The Psalms are a great collection of songs of the people of God. They include a great variety of expressions of human experience and emotion but conclude with an emphatic call to praise God. Psalm 150 is the ultimate climax which briefly explains why we should praise God, then tells us to do so with a variety of instruments suggesting we should do so corporately and creatively. This has much to show us about the kind of church God is calling us to be.

150 Lyrics of Life

This week in the papers it was announced that Paul McCartney, one of the surviving Beatles was going to publish an autobiography.

However, as a twist this autobiography was going to be written as a collection of 154 song lyrics: THE LYRICS: 1956 to the Present.

It will begin with some of his earliest boyhood compositions and include lyrics that were written throughout his life. He says that the lyrics serve a similar purpose to a diary.

In the Bible there is also a collection of 150 song lyrics. They are called the Psalms and they span the experiences that we face throughout life. They include wisdom for the best way to live life, expressions of a confident faith and moments of great doubt and disillusionment with God, anger at the corruption of others, confessions of personal sin, there are descriptions of despair and even deep depression, alongside earnest heartfelt cries for help and great declarations of praise. The Psalms are a kind of diary of life worked out by people seeking to live as God's people in the reality and messiness of life.

And having worked through all the messiness and struggles of a life lived with God, what is the end result? Praise!

The last 5 Psalms all begin and end with the Hebrew Word: *Hallelujah!* Which means, 'Praise the Lord!' Then in Psalm 150, the final short, but climactic Psalm, alongside the beginning and end *Hallelujah!* We are told 10 times to 'Praise God' or 'Praise him!'

When all is said and done in the pressures, struggles and difficulties of life, the final word is *Hallelujah!*

And as the Psalm says in verse 6, this is what everyone is called to do. It is not meant to be the preserve of a religious few, but the ultimate goal of the whole of creation:

"Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!"

But why praise God?

Why Praise God? - vs. 2

The Psalm gives us a very brief answer in verse 2:

- **Because of what he has done... - vs. 2a**

Firstly, it says because of his acts of power.

For the writer of the Psalm this probably included:

God's creation of the universe,
the Exodus, God's rescue of Israel from Egypt with great signs and wonders
and the establishment of the Davidic kingship in Jerusalem.

For us as Christians and in the throne room of heaven, we of course add the ministry and works of Jesus to the list. His death and resurrection. In Revelation Jesus is often pictured as a lamb, the one who gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins, rose from the dead and created a new people of God and they praise him for this:

"And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." (Revelation 5:9)

- If you are struggling to praise God, then perhaps you need to read the Bible to remind yourself once more of what he has done for you!

- **Because of who he is... - vs. 2b**

Secondly it says because of his surpassing greatness.

We praise children when they do well, we praise musicians and artists when we really like their music or scientists, business people or politicians when they are successful in their fields. But ultimately all these people are just human beings like you and me.

God is different. Very different.

In Revelation, when the heavenly hosts praise God they sing:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come."
(Revelation 4:8)

Firstly, God is 'Holy' that means he is totally set apart above and beyond everything else. All other things are created. God is the creator. There is nothing or no-one like God. Nothing and no-one can ever approach his greatness. If the main focus of our praise is on things or people other than God, then it is so much less.

Secondly, God is eternal. He was and is and is to come. Everything else has its time. It is temporary and will pass. Nothing else can ultimately be relied on. But God always has been and always will be!

Thirdly, God's love is above and beyond the love and commitment that anyone else can give us. This is shown most powerfully in the fact that the Son of God came to die for us. It is his loving sacrifice that makes him worthy of our praise. As the heavenly host in the book of Revelation declares:

""Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"" (Revelation 5:12)

- If you are struggling to praise God, then perhaps you need to open your eyes afresh to who he actually is.

- **Because it opens our eyes...**

When we open our eyes to see what God has done and who he is, then we praise more naturally. But praise also helps us to open our eyes to see who God is it.

When the skies are grey and dark, life can feel miserable. Yet, the sun and the blue sky are still there above the clouds. Sometimes a glimpse of blue sky or the sun breaking through the clouds can really lift our spirits.

In a similar way we can often be overwhelmed by the difficulties and struggles of life, especially during this time of Pandemic. But when we praise God, we break through the clouds of despair to the God who is always there.

=> Helps lift us out of lowness:

- So praise helps to open our eyes to God and lifts us from our despair and lowness. This is the thrust of many Psalms, that acknowledge the struggles of life, but are always pulling us back to praise God:
- Take Psalm 42 for example:
"I say to God my Rock,
Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?"
My bones suffer mortal agony
as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"
Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Saviour and my God." (Psalm 42:9-11)
- In one of our recent surveys someone said:
"When feeling low, the Psalms have been really helpful and uplifting; they are also great for praising and worshipping God."
- Someone else said:
"Trying to praise and thank God in every situation and to take everything to Him and to trust Him to answer in His perfect time."

If you are feeling weighed down with life and you are able to praise God, then doing so can really help to lift our Spirits and reignite our joy!

=> Help with Prayer and Share:

It can be that when it comes to personal prayer or reading the Bible we can struggle to concentrate on what we are doing.

One way to help in those situation is to begin with praise. To focus afresh on the one you are speaking and listening to can help to focus your mind and heart afresh to reinvigorate your quiet times of prayer and Bible study.

So why not start these times by singing a favourite hymn or song, or reading a Psalm like Psalm 150. It may really help focus your time with God.

After all this is what church services do. Our praise through hymns and songs puts us in the right frame of mind to pray and to listen to God's word being explained.

When we asked people, 'What has helped you pray in the lockdown?' someone said:
"Online services. Listening to praise music. Wonder of nature."

How to Praise God? - vs. 3-5

So, if praise is so important, how do we praise God?

Verses 3-5 of our Psalm give some hints.

- **Corporately**

Firstly, although we can praise God by ourselves, we also need to do it corporately, with others.

That seems to be the thrust of Psalm 150. When it describes all the different instruments what is being described is not a one man band, but an orchestra! This is corporate praise.

And when we've looked at the Praise in Revelation, the image is of a great gathering praising God. After all God is worthy of more than individual praise, he is worthy of being praise by everything with breath!

- Our online services try to create a sense of corporate praise, and we are grateful for our virtual choir and all the contributors who help with that. But many of us really long for the time when we can gather together and sing praises as a great crowd to God.

The creativity reimagine and reignite group has already started working planning and thinking about how we can do that better coming out of lockdown. You may not want to be part of the planning, but the more people that can use their gifts and talents to help us praise God the better and we'd love to hear from you, if you think you can help.

So Can you help?

- As a musician
- As someone to help lead the singing
- As a technician to help run the sound system and livestreaming.

If you think you might be able to help. Let us know!

- **Creatively**

Secondly, we need to praise God creatively. The vast range of different instruments in Psalm 150 suggests great creativity and variety in the praise.

After all we are made in God's image and God is the Creator.

So, we are made to be creative and use our gifts and talents to bring praise to God.

And actually, the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem is one that will incorporate the great cultural achievements of humanity as a kind of praise to God.

"The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it."

(Revelation 21:24)

- So how can we be creative in our praise today and use a variety of talents?
 - We've seen in our Online services all the following used to help enhance our praise of God:
 - Photos
 - Pictures (Children last Easter...)
 - Music

- Reading
- Video Editing

Please keep sending your creative contributions, so that we can keep enhancing our online praise!

- Perhaps we also need to think of other ways to be creative during lockdown...
 - Listen to Christian music
 - Write a poem of praise to God
 - Draw a picture to glorify God

One idea that I heard from Fay Hatton last week was the idea of writing a mini-autobiography. When this includes reference to what God has done in your life, then this in itself amounts to a kind of praise.

As I said in this week's email it would be great to share these on our website, so that others can read this praise to God.

Saint Augustine wrote an autobiography called, *Confessions*, that has been described as one of the masterpieces of Christian literature. In it he describes powerfully how God worked in his life. In itself it was a great work of Christian praise that has endured for 1500 years.

I suspect Paul McCartney's autobiography creative as it may be, will fail to endure because it will fail to seek to praise the LORD!

God is worthy of our praise, so lets gather together as much as we can and find creative ways to praise him! Hallelujah!