

Anywhere, Anyhow, Anyone

Psalm 150

One Thanksgiving season a family was seated around their table, looking at the annual holiday bird. From the oldest to the youngest, they were to express their praise. When they came to the 5-year-old in the family, he began by looking at the turkey and expressing his thanks to the turkey, saying that although he had not tasted it he knew it would be good. After that rather novel expression of thanksgiving, he began with a more predictable line of credits, thanking his mother for cooking the turkey and his father for buying the turkey. But then he went beyond that.

He went on, "I thank you for the checker at the grocery store who checked out the turkey. I thank you for the grocery store people who put it on the shelf. I thank you for the farmer who made it fat. I thank you for the man who made the feed. I thank you for those who brought the turkey to the store."

He traced the turkey all the way from its origin to his plate. And then at the end he solemnly said, "Did I leave anybody out?" His 2-year-old brother, embarrassed by all these proceedings, said, "God."

Solemnly and without being flustered at all, the 5-year-old said, "I was about to get to Him." (*Getting Around to God; Citation: Joel Gregory, "The Unlikely Thanker," Preaching Today, Tape No. 110.*)

Have you gotten around to Him lately?

Once upon a time, an old woman dearly loved her Lord. Often her cup of joy overflowed. A favorite expression of hers was, "Praise the Lord!" Often, in God's house, when the minister preached, she would say, "Praise the Lord!" Sometimes, however, the minister was disturbed by this, and he would lose his train of thought. He pondered what he might do to kindly discourage the old woman's outbursts.

Finally, he got an idea. The woman was very poor, and so the minister offered her a box of groceries every month on behalf of the Benevolent Fund of the church if she would only refrain from saying, "Praise the Lord!" during his sermons. She greatly needed the groceries, so she did her best to earn them on the minister's terms. For many Sundays, she kept perfectly quiet during the sermon.

One day, however, the minister preached on forgiveness of sin, with its attendant blessings and joys. And as he preached, the old woman thought less and less of the

groceries, and more and more of the joys of salvation. Finally she could stand it no longer. To everyone's surprise, she cried out: "Groceries or no groceries—PRAISE THE LORD!"

There are times when we just can't help it!

The Book of Psalms is a book of praises. Psalm 150 is the very last psalm, and it begins with the words, "Praise the Lord." We're all familiar with the word "Hallelujah"—That is actually two Hebrew words, and it is found here in verse one, and again at the end of the psalm in verse six. The word "praise" is "hallu," and the word for "Lord" is the Hebrew word "Yah." Put them together and you have "hallelujah." So quite literally, whenever you say "Hallelujah" you are saying "Praise the Lord."

Psalm 150 answers four questions about praise, questions that we need to answer in order to understand all we can about praising God. Praising God is one of the highest and noblest things we can do as Christians.

1 Where is God to be praised? (v. 1)

This last of the psalms begins with a command to praise the Lord! And it is fitting that the first place mentioned as to where we should praise God is in the sanctuary. It is here that we truly come face to face with God. It is here that we confront the evil of our inner selves. It is here that we worship God. The sanctuary is set aside for that purpose. Yes, we can praise God with the way we live, or while on our jobs or while enjoying recreation. And that is fine and good—worship and praise should be a part of who we are, not just a section of our lives we enter occasionally when we have nothing else to do. But the tragic thing is that so many people who claim to be followers of Christ rarely find time to praise God in His sanctuary!

The psalm then turns to the rest of the world, and says we are to praise God in "*his mighty heavens*." There are others who would leave that aspect of praise off completely as well. They would confine our worship and praise of God to a narrow space of time on Sunday mornings, or to a church building, never thinking to praise God once we leave that time and that place.

Let us praise God! Let us praise Him under the mighty heavens, where trees grow majestically, where waters flow and birds sing and flowers burst into bloom and thunder rolls and lightning flashes and winter comes and spring returns. Let us praise God in His wondrous creation, where lovers are married and babies are born

and waves roll in and sand and seashore are constantly changing. Let us praise the Lord!

2 Why is God to be praised? (v. 2)

The human mind, as questioning and logical as it is, then would turn to ask another question: Why is God to be praised? The psalm covers the whole spectrum when it says “*Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.*” Verse two gives us two basic reasons why God is to be praised.

First, we should praise God for what He has done. “*Praise him for his acts of power,*” the psalmist sang, and this covers every deed experienced and recorded in the Bible. It also includes those not in Holy Scripture. It includes those deeds God has done for mankind in every age, for every person, in every circumstance. It includes deeds God is bringing to pass in this very moment, as well as deeds we have not yet dreamed of! It is overwhelming to think of the wonderful, inexhaustible supply of His goodness and grace which He has shown to us through His deeds, the things He has done for you and me.

You and I may have different experiences with the Lord as far as our most recent blessing is concerned. But one blessing we share in common: if you are born again, we have a saving knowledge of Christ. The Son of God, born of the virgin Mary, lived a life without sin—even paying the penalty for *my* sin!—died for us on the cross, then conquered death for all time by rising victoriously on the third day—**that** Jesus lives even now at the right hand of God! And that is one deed of God we can praise Him for together!

Dwight Moody was once preaching a sermon where he used the 103rd Psalm as his text, and he came to verses 1 and 2 which read, “*Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.*” Moody suddenly stopped and said to the congregation, “You can’t *remember* them all, of course, but don’t *forget* them all. Remember some of them!” We, too, would do well to remember some of them.

Second, we should praise God for who He is. The psalmist mentioned His “*surpassing greatness.*” Who is God to you? The Scriptures portray God as Creator and Master Designer of the Universe. This is the God who grants to us today the same care and love He offered to the Hebrew people. This is the God who sent His Son to die for our sins so that we might be able to spend eternity with Him. This is the God who gives to us through faith the riches of His grace. This the

God whose exceeding greatness is seen in the myriad other little things—sunshine and dark of night, in joy or sorrow, and in the plan of the universe so we are neither scorched nor do we freeze, in our bodies so that infection is warded off and our bones fit so neatly together. This is the God whose exceeding greatness is seen in the simple joys of life we sometimes miss because we are so busy with other things.

Yes, praise Him for what He has done, and for Who He is!

3 How is God to be praised? (vv. 4-5)

In exploring how to we are to praise God, the psalmist includes several different kinds of musical instruments. Perhaps he did this to indicate to people at worship which instruments to play and at what time.

But it is interesting to note that when we ask, “How are we to worship God?” the psalmist gives us more words here than for any of our other questions. We need to know how to do many things: how to fix our cars, how to plant a garden, balance a checkbook, drive a car, etc. But one “how-to” often ignored is how to praise God.

The list of musical instruments here includes those for simple music-making as well as instruments found in great orchestras.

There is the resounding trumpet. This wasn’t like any trumpet we have today. This was a ram’s horn, and it was used to signal the presence of God for the people at worship. The trumpet sounded on solemn occasions, at the giving of the Law, at the beginning of the Jewish Year of Jubilee, at the coronation of a king, and at the beginning of war.

Civil defense sirens can be found in many towns and cities across our country. The sound that comes from one of those sirens is piercing, so that you can even hear it indoors. Why is that sound the one that warns of tornado warnings or other calamity? Because it is louder and more piercing than the normal sounds you might hear. The ram’s horn was chosen because in that day it sounded the loudest note, in order to draw people together with an unmistakable sound.

Then,

There is the harmony of the lyre and harp.

There is the throbbing rhythm of the tambourine (hand drum) and the dance.

There is the ensemble of stringed instruments.

There is the band of wind instruments.

There were the clash of cymbals and the resounding cymbals. The King James Version calls these “loud cymbals” and “high sounding cymbals.” These were different in their size as well as their volume.

But in answering the question “How?” it is as though the psalmist is saying, “Praise God with everything you have!” Pay attention to this: notice how the instruments named here are played. The trumpet, or ram’s horn, is played with the breath. The lyre and harp are played with the fingers. The dance is done with the feet. The tambourine and the cymbals are played with the whole hand. When a man wants to praise God, he may bring into his service every kind of power he possesses, in every way he can!

4 Who is to praise God? (v. 6)

And then, finally, *who* is to praise God? We’ve covered why, and where and how, but now who? The psalm leaves nothing lacking when it gives the answer—it includes everything that breathes. Humans, dogs, cats, elephants, birds, cows, horses. It also includes crickets and butterflies and fish and ants. But a tragic thing here, too, is that many humans are outdone by the animals of a lower form of life. They may not consciously be praising God but their very existence is a form of praise. There are some humans whose existence is not a praise of God, but a blasphemy, a detriment to His name, because they live lives as if there were no God, as if He never sent His Son to die for us, as though Jesus never conquered death, and never demands obedience to His will. **People like that are outdone by the very dogs that lie on their doorsteps, or the cats that walk with muddy feet on their cars’ windshields.**

The Bible says that all nature praises God. Psalm 148 tells us that the angels praise Him, and that the sun and moon and every shining star praises God. It also includes these words: *“Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children.”*

There is not a better way to end the book of Psalms, the Book of Praises, than with a personal call to praise the Lord. “Hallelujah!” It can never be enough for us that praise is being offered by someone else. We must become personally involved in the praise of our God. It must be *our* praise! Each one of us should do what he or she can, and in the best way he can—anywhere, anyhow, anyone.

At a conference at a Presbyterian church in Omaha, Nebraska, a few years ago, the people were given helium-filled balloons and told to release them at some point in the service when they felt like expressing the joy in their hearts. Since they were Presbyterians, they weren't free to say "Hallelujah," or "Praise the Lord." All through the service balloons ascended, but when it was over one-third of the balloons were unreleased.

Is it time to let *your* balloon go? Praise is the natural outpouring of a grateful heart. It comes from those who have something to be eternally thankful for. Can you say that today?