

Christmas Psalms: Sing to the Lord (Part 2)

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you this morning.

A special welcome if you are visiting or new with us. We're glad you're here. And as I say every week, we're glad you're here not because you are filling a seat, but because we are following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow him together as one community, we are convinced that there is no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it. And so everyone needs to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

If you've been with us this month, you know that we're in the season of Advent. Advent is an English word that comes from a Latin word, and it simply means to come or to arrive. And so the Advent season is when we celebrate what Jesus has done in the past, what God has done by sending his son, that he came and arrived here in this world in real space, in real time as a baby.

But we also have the task not just of celebrating what happened in the past, but looking forward to what will happen in the future. We have Jesus' first coming that we celebrate at Christmas, but also his second coming that we look forward to.

[1 : 16] And as we do that, we've been going through the Psalms. And the Psalms are simply 150 different models of ways to talk to God, to talk about God. And now we're at the very end.

We're in the last of our four Psalms that we're going through. If you remember, we started with Psalm 13, which talked about the struggle that we have when we feel the presence of sin and evil in this world, but we don't see the presence of God.

It seems like he's absent, that his blessings have left us. And so we sing our sorrow, but also our hope. We don't get caught in one or the other. We looked then at Psalm 72.

We talked about our longing for good leaders, our longing for leaders who love justice and righteousness, even as we live under, at worst, evil, at best, imperfect leaders.

And the Psalms there showed us that we continue to praise and pray to God because he is coming as the perfect king. He's coming as the ultimate ruler, the ultimate king, the leader who will give us the justice and the righteousness that we long for.

[2 : 19] And then last week we looked at Psalm 96, which was a hymn of praise. And so we asked the question, why do we praise God when we don't feel like it?

Why do we praise him? Why do we praise him? What makes him more excellent than other things that we praise? What makes him worthy and worth it? And so we talked about different places that we see praise.

I mentioned to you the great Capone family tradition of Amazon.com reviews and the need to find things that are worthy of praise. Not just worthy of praise, but people who are willing to tell us all the reasons that something is praiseworthy.

And so that's what Psalm 96 showed us. It showed us the things that are praiseworthy about God.

And we're going to continue to talk about praise this morning. We're going to be in Psalm 148.

And praise is something that we see all around us. It's not just something that we see in Amazon.com reviews. And as I mentioned before, there are things in the Psalms that overlap with each other.

[3 : 18] There's redundancies. And so we were not able to talk about everything that was in Psalm 96 last week. And we're not going to be able to talk about everything that's in Psalm 148. So I'm going to jump back a little bit to 196 at points.

And we're going to look at 148 as well. One thing we did not talk about last week, we talked about praise in general, but we did not talk about singing specifically. Now the Psalms are not just a

model of 150 different ways to talk to God, but they were actually sung by God's people in the Old Testament.

And if you remember from the beginning of Psalm 96, the very first thing we're told is not just to praise God, but to sing to Him, to sing a new song. And so while praise is something that we see all around us, singing is something that is around us as well.

If you believe that singing praise is something that is limited to church, that it's strange, that it's unusual, then I would submit to you that you have never, ever, once in your life seen a Disney movie.

Because half of the point of Disney movies is that something or someone would be praised. If you've watched Frozen, you know that Elsa praises and celebrates individualism and the freedom that she feels when she casts off society's expectations for her.

[4 : 33] If you've seen Aladdin, you know that Aladdin and Jasmine in a whole new world sing about and celebrate the wonders of going on new adventures, experiencing novelty, seeing things for the first time.

If you have watched my favorite, The Jungle Book, you know that Baloo the Bear and Mowgli sing the bear necessities and they praise all the glorious things that happen when you celebrate the freedom and the happiness and the peace that come from minimalism and living off of nature. And so praise and singing are things that are all around us, whether we want to believe it or not. Last week we asked the big question of why is God worthy of praise? And now we're going to focus in even more specifically, why do we sing to God?

We saw in Psalm 96 that there are many reasons we praise God. First and foremost, his salvation for us, that he has saved us from the penalty and power of sin. Secondly, we praise him as the creator.

He's made the heavens and the earth. And then third, we praise him as the sustainer. He's the one who keeps the world moving and going. And so those were our answers. That was how we were supposed to stir up our emotions if we did not feel like praising God.

[5 : 48] But what if even that is not enough for us? What if we're at the beginning of Psalm 13, for example, and we don't see any of those things, we can't feel them or experience them?

How and why do we continue to sing to God nevertheless? What if we are unmoved? What if we're still stuck, as we've talked about before, stuck with cynicism, unable to see hope?

That's the question we're going to take with us to Psalm 148. I'm going to read Psalm 148 for us now. And remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and that it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so I'm reading now, starting with verse one. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise him in the heights. Praise him, all his angels.

Praise him, all his hosts. Praise him, sun and moon. Praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens.

[6 : 56] Verse five. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. And he established them forever and ever. He gave a decree, and it shall not pass away.

Praise the Lord from the earth. You great sea creatures in all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word. Verse nine.

Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds. Verse 11. Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth, young men and maidens together, old men and children.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted. His majesty is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people.

Praise for all his saints, for the people of Israel who are near to him. Praise the Lord. Lord, please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

[8 : 05] Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you've given us your word, first and foremost, that you have not left us wondering about what we should do or how we should do it, but you've instructed us like a good father.

Father, we thank you that you have provided for us in such a way that you are worthy of praise, and so we ask that you would help us. You would help us understand your word, that you'd help us to know you better, and you'd help us to do what you call us to do, what you command us to do, that

you would help us to praise you.

We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen. Now, if I were to summarize this psalm, it's pretty simple. There's a picture that's being given for us in Psalm 148, and it's this.

There is a choir. There's a choir that is singing, and they're singing in different sections. They're responding to each other. First, there's the heavenly portion of the choir. That's the part that starts out, so not every part of the choir is singing at once, but we have the heavenly portion singing at first, and they have their reasons, the reasons that they're singing.

These are things that we talked about last week, verses 5 and 6. They're praising because God created them. So that's the reason that part of the choir is singing. And then the other part of the choir, the earthly part of the choir, responds in song.

[9 : 21] So you can imagine there's the heavenly choir up high, and they sing out God's praise. Then there's the earthly choir down below, and they answer in praise. But it's not just that.

They're then joined, not just by the heavens and the earth, but then by the people who live in it. And these people are not just one section. It's not just some people, but everyone, kings of the earth and all peoples, young men and maidens, old men and children.

So the powerful are praising God, but also those without power. The old are praising God, but also the young. Men are praising God, but women are praising him as well.

And they're praising them again for what we talked about in Psalm 96. They're praising him for his salvation. And so we're seeing here the repetition of what we've already seen, that God is praised. He's praised for his salvation.

He's praised for his creation. He's praised for his ruling over everything in the world. There's also a bookend. If you have listened to me teach before, especially in the book of Matthew, you know that I'm a huge fan of bookends.

[10 : 26] Whenever we're reading the Bible, if we see something that appears both at the beginning and at the end, we know that it is incredibly important. In fact, often it is the primary point of the passage. And here our bookend is what is also repeated over and over and over again.

Praise the Lord. And so it's not just something that is good for us. God is not just something that might move our emotions as we see what he's done to recognize that he's worthy of our praise, but it is something that God has told us to do.

He has commanded it. And so God telling us, in and of itself, should be enough for us to praise him. But C.S. Lewis tells us that when he became a Christian, one of the things that was most challenging for him as he read the Psalms was seeing the command to praise over and over.

Because he thought, who is this God who just needs our praise? This seems like something that's petty, something that's needy. And then as he began to think about it, he realized what we've already talked about, that this is something that permeates all of our lives.

And so C.S. Lewis realized that people who do not praise, people who do not glory in God, are the same as people who've never been in love. He compares it to people who've never been in love or people who have never read a good book, people who are deaf and are unable to hear music.

[11 : 55] And then he realizes and recognizes that praise is what we do for anything that we find good. When we see a movie that we appreciate, when we read a book that we love, it's the natural response of humans to praise the source of it.

And so if we are not praising, then we're like someone who's deaf and can't hear music. We're like someone who's unable to read and cannot appreciate a wonderful book.

We're like someone who's blind and is not able to see the glory that God has given us in this world. And so God's command to praise here is God telling us to do what we would naturally do for anything else.

And so first of all, we praise God. We obey his command to us because he tells us. But we praise him because we're doing and recognizing what we would do with everything else in this world.

And so as we struggle at times with the idea of praise, the concept, when we hit up against the fact that we often don't feel like praising, Psalm 148 first and foremost reminds us that this is God's command for us.

[13 : 11] He wants us to praise him because it is for our good. This praise that comes from the choir, though, is not just praise in general, but it is praise that comes from every portion of God's creation.

Everything is praising God. It is the entire earth. It's not just God's people, but his animals that are praising. It's the heavens. And if you think this is strange, I would also submit that you haven't seen a Disney movie to see animals and creation praising.

But I would also remind you of Jesus' words in Luke 19. If you remember the story of Jesus' death, he begins by entering Jerusalem. And as he enters Jerusalem, many people come and are praising him.

They're laying down palm branches. And so some leaders come to Jesus and tell him to stop it. They want him to stop all the praise that's going on because they find it inappropriate. Do you remember what Jesus says to them?

He essentially says, yes, I could do that. But if they didn't praise me, the rocks would cry out. In other words, God's praise is so necessary.

[14:26] It is such an obligation and a duty for the people that he's made that if we fail in it, the creation itself will have to step in to fill our place. But these parts of creation, everything praising God at once reminds us of a second thing about praise.

Not just that it's God's command to us, but this full-bodied, whole creation praise that happens in Psalm 148 shows us a picture of what happens to us as well.

That when we praise, when we sing to God, singing is something more than anything else that engages every single part of our body. When I preached on Psalm 13, I mentioned a quote by a man named Andy Crouch talking about the people in Haiti who sang.

He also says this about singing. Singing may be the one human activity that most perfectly combines heart, mind, soul, and strength. Almost everything we do requires at least one of these fundamental human faculties.

But singing, and only singing, combines them all. In other words, just as all of creation is combined in praising God in Psalm 148, so when we obey God's commands in Psalm 96 to sing a new song, and His command here in Psalm 148 to praise Him, we are also doing the one thing that allows us to give our whole person to Him.

[15:53] And not only are we giving our whole person to Him, but we are engaging our whole person. And so if we find ourselves like someone who's deaf and can't hear music, or someone who's blind and can't see the world that God's created, singing is the instrument, it is the tool that God has given us to be able to begin to see again, to be able to begin to hear again.

It's an activity that God has created and He's given to us for our good. That if we find ourselves stuck, when we find ourselves numb or cynical, when we find ourselves grieving or hopeless, if we're unmoved by all the things that were listed in the review of God in Psalm 96, this is our way out.

God has given us singing as the tool. And so He commands us to do this, first because He is worthy of praise. He's more excellent than anything else that we would give praise to.

But second of all, it's commanded here as it is in all of the Bible, because this is the thing that allows us to grow more and more in our love for God. And so if you are burnt out, if you need Jesus and His grace, if you feel the darkness of this world creeping in on you little by little, if you're not looking forward to conversations on Christmas Day, if you're afraid of the division in your family, if you find your world slowly shrinking, God has given us this as His way to care for us, that we would praise the Lord along with the rest of creation.

As I mentioned last week, this is how we actually come back in tune with what is real. When we praise God, we are doing what the rest of creation has already done before us.

[18:09] We're reconnecting with reality. And so the application is simple. Praise God. Praise God by being with us here on a Sunday morning.

Praise God by singing loud, even if it annoys your neighbor. Praise God by singing loud because you know that this is what's going to re-energize and reorient your mind and your heart.

And so sing with us, not because we need you to, but because you need it. Knowing that this is the way that you cultivate your love for God.

What we praise, we end up loving. There are lots of different ways to figure out, diagnose our health as a culture or a society.

I know one pastor who says that he can quickly tell the health of a congregation by the quality of their singing, but we could also tell the health of a culture. I recently listened to someone who made the observation that more and more in our culture, and he was speaking especially of North America, we are not a people that sing.

[19 : 25] There are not many places left in our society where there are people who don't just sing alone in their cars to the radio, but people who come together and sing as one body.

And so if we want to be healthy as a church, if we want to be healthy as a culture, then we have to be people who sing together. Singing not because we are trying to do what's excellent, not because we want to be on tune, but singing because that is how we join with God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength.

And this isn't just something in the Psalms. In the book of James, the author asks, he says, is anyone cheerful? And then he says, let him sing praise.

And so this is what we do. This is how we bring ourselves to God. This is how we express our love for him, but it's also how we grow our love for him.

And so come and sing with us. Sing when you're here on Sunday morning with us. Sing as loud as you can. Name God's praise throughout the week.

[20 : 42] When you're at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, remember that these are the animals that God made. When you're driving and you see the mountains, remember those are the mountains that God made.

When you see your own growth, as we talked about last week, in holiness, loving more and more the things that God loves, and seeing the presence of evil diminish more and more. Praise God. Name the fact that God is the one who has done that in your life. And then we can truly do what we're commanded here in Psalm 148, to praise the Lord.

this psalm, however, doesn't just show us a choir that's singing to God. It also shows us a destination.

You may have noticed that as we've gone through the psalms, we have gone through them in chronological order. In other words, we started with Psalm 13. We did not start with Psalm 148. We're doing them in order.

[21 : 47] We went from Psalm 13 to Psalm 72 and then Psalm 96 and now Psalm 148. And there's a reason for that because the psalm's structure itself teaches us something.

When we get to the very end of the psalter, many people have observed that there is no psalm of lament here. In fact, the last six psalms of the book are all psalms of praise.

And they become more and more ecstatic as it goes on until we end with Psalm 150. And not just ecstatic, but saying the same thing over and over and over again.

And so the point that the psalmist is making is this. As we live the Christian life, as we sing the psalm of lament in Psalm 13, as we look to God as our great king in Psalm 72, what will happen more and more is what happens in the psalter, that we will more and more grow in our praise.

And not only that, but as we look forward to Jesus' second coming, as we look forward to that end, that will be the same end as the psalter, that it will be an end of praise.

[23 : 11] And so praise is not just how we stir up our love for God. It's not just the tool that God has given to us. It is not just a strategy, but it is our destination.

That we're moving closer and closer to God and His praise. That the trajectory, the path of the psalms is our path as well. That we move in and out of various situations and trials and griefs. But at the end, when we make it to the end, what we're left with is praise. And so what happens in the last six psalms here in this book are what are going to happen to us this life, in this life, more and more as we follow after God and we see Him and His provision.

But it's also what's going to happen to us at the end, at Jesus' second coming. When we look at the book of Revelation, what we see at the end of time is everyone around the throne of God praising Him and singing.

And this is not some boring activity, but this is people finally recognizing and seeing what is most beautiful more clearly than they've ever seen it before.

[24 : 32] There was a time in my life, probably a three-year period where I had a stint of running half marathons. And this was mainly with my dad.

There was only one time I ran one with friends. I refused to run one by myself. So it was a social activity. But one thing that you'll know if you run enough half marathons, this will be true for marathons as well, is that when you start out, things are very exciting.

There's loud music playing, just pump up, work out songs. And then there will be other places along the route depending on which one you run.

This is more true of ones that happen in cities. But there will be other places along the route where there will be bands there for you playing. And so there are many times as you're running, you'll come across someone cheering you on or a band playing out loud to encourage you, to lift your spirits, to help you keep going when things are hard.

But then there's times where there's no music. And you're just plodding away one foot after the other on your race. And that's much like the Christian life.

[25 : 47] That there are times in our lives where we feel the presence of God. We can see and experience praise. things are exciting. Maybe it's the beginning of our new family.

Maybe it's a new chapter at a church. Maybe it's the excitement of being in a certain period in our lives where we feel like we're growing and learning so much. But then there's other times where there's no music at all.

Times where we're filled with grief. Times where we're filled with doubts. We're not sure if this is the right race that we're running. Times we're filled with discouragement.

And yet we know when we get to the end. When you're at the end of the race, at the end of the half marathon, all the best music is saved for that. That's where the biggest band is.

No one puts their biggest band at the beginning of the race. And no one puts it at the middle. It's always the greatest and largest band that is waiting for you at the end that when you've finished your race, then you can celebrate.

[27 : 04] And so first of all, that is the future that's put forward for us here. That as we go along in the Christian life, we go along looking at music in the past that has cheered us on.

When we find ourselves alone with no music playing one foot after the other, we look forward to the great praise that awaits us in the future.

But there's another trick as well. I've only run half marathons, but my father has become an avid marathoner and just finished a multi-year journey, multi-year struggle to qualify for the Boston Marathon.

And if you know anything about running, you know this is the great goal of many runners. It's competitive. It's hard to achieve. You have to reach a certain time. You have to keep making your miles faster and faster to be able to meet the qualifying time to run in the Boston Marathon.

And my dad's finally going to be able to do it this spring, so we're excited for him. But there are many times that my father is on the race and there is no music playing.

[28 : 14] So do you know what he does? My dad has figured out which songs have the right rhythm for him to keep going.

And so when he is on the race and there is no music playing, he sings the songs in his head. He picks songs that have three-quarter time or six-eight time because he says those are the best to keep his breathing under control.

He'll sing my favorite things from the sound of music in his head to make sure he's going in the right pace. He told me another one is 10 minutes ago from Cinderella.

He and my mom watched that recently so now that's one of his. But as he finds himself in a place where there's no music playing, as he's going along in this great struggle to make it all the way past 26 miles, when the music is not playing around him, he plays it in his own head.

Because that is how we know and pace ourselves even when the finish line is so far away. And so as we finish our series on the Advent, as we come to the end of Psalms, we on the one hand are celebrating what has happened in the past, looking back to Jesus' first coming.

[29 : 44] And we are looking forward to what he will do in the future and yet right now we're just running. We're just putting one foot in front of the other in faith, knowing and hoping and looking forward to what God has for us in the future.

And so how do we make it? How do we make it through the in-between time, the tension of not living in the past when Jesus came and not living in the future when he's coming again?

The answer's here for us in Psalm 148 and it's this. Praise the Lord. When we can't hear or see the music, God has given it to us.

And so we keep on praising, we keep on running, pursuing everything that God has given for us. Please pray with me. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you that you're worthy of praise.

Thank you that you've given us a race to run, a race of faith that involves your praise and will end in your praise. We ask that you would help us now as we live in between everything that you have for us.

[31 : 02] That we would keep praising you even when we can't see, even when we feel stuck. That we would understand our need for your grace, but we would also see you meeting us at that very same point of need.

We ask all these things in the name of your Son. Amen. Amen.