

We are not surprised that Jesus' Prayer Book should end with resounding praise. There is a time and place for lament. There are special occasions for thanksgiving. Critical situations invoke anguished prayers of pain. Covenant worship recalls the history of God's redemption and pilgrimage anticipates communal worship. Evil incites dark psalms of pent up hatred poured out to God. But it is always the time and place to praise the Lord.

Psalm 150 is the final doxology in the set of five Hallel Psalms (Ps 146-150) that bring the entire Psalter with its five books to a conclusion. The psalm is all praise; it is only praise. Nothing more needs to be said, except to praise the Lord. The psalmist chose "not to argue, to teach, to explain; but cries with burning words, 'Praise him, Praise him, Praise the LORD.'" ¹ "To attempt to say something final about Yhwh," writes Goldingay, "would inevitably be anticlimactic. Everything in the previous 149 psalms have affirmed about Yhwh offers the reasons and content for this praise."² All the challenges have been given and all the dark questions have been asked. All that is left to do is to praise the Lord. Psalm 150 is the ever ready call to praise in the moment and for eternity. There is never a time when Psalm 150 is untimely and never place where it is unwelcome.

Augustine humbly acknowledged that the arrangement of the Psalms was a "mighty mystery," but that did not stop him from speculating as to the reason for one hundred and fifty psalms. The number fifteen suggested to him "the agreement of the two Testaments," because seven signified the Old Testament week ending in Sabbath rest and eight signified the New Testament week ending in Resurrection hope. Augustine's numerology is not the point, but his sensibility as to the agreement of the Old and New Testaments is.³ We have prayed the Psalms that Jesus prayed in concert with Old Testament understanding and New Testament fulfillment. Jesus has made the psalms come alive for us. Between David and Israel we have seen the Son of David and the True Israel. We have seen how the psalms interface with the gospel narratives and the apostolic witness. The Holy Spirit has extended the redemptive trajectory of the psalms and liberated the text so that we can think Christianly about the psalms. Jesus Christ is the redemptive key that unlocks the psalms making them essential for spiritual formation and worship. In the Spirit the psalms teach us what it means to follow Jesus.

Psalm 150 corresponds to Psalm 1 the way Psalm 149 corresponds to Psalm 2. Together these four psalms form an *inclusio* for the entire Psalter. They represent the *personal* and *political* scope of true obedience and worship. Beatitude-based living (Ps 1) frames the community life of the people of God who are destined to live between the Hallelujahs (Ps 150). The Psalms begin with a personal call for daily obedience and reverence for the Law of God and end with a communal call to praise the Lord for making such a blessed life possible.

After we have pled our lament, vented our hate, and railed against evil, it is time to praise the

¹ Spurgeon, Treasury of David, Psalm 150.

² Goldingay, Psalms, 747.

³ Augustine, Psalm 150, 681.

Lord; after we have entered into the unfolding drama of salvation and meditated on the greatness of God's creation, it is time to praise. And by the time we reach the end of the Psalter Psalm 150 stands ready to grapple with "the problem of how to render to God adequate praise."⁴ The *who*, *where*, *why*, and *how* of praise is contained in an all-inclusive summons to praise.

Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
praise him with timbrel and dancing,
praise him with the strings and pipes,
praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

Psalm 150:1-6

Who we praise is clearly understood in the light of the entire Psalter. We are summoned thirteen times in the imperative voice to praise the Lord. The whole psalm is an exclamatory call to exuberant praise and the person to be praised has been set forth from Psalm 1. The praise book of the Bible provides a worship theology that deepens our understanding of God. We answer God in these Spirit-inspired psalms out of the highs and lows of human experience. By God's grace we relate to God in his holiness, righteousness, justice, and mercy. Our naive notions of God are shattered even as our love for God grows. The Psalms celebrate the Lord's steadfast love and his sacrificial grace. The God-centeredness of the Psalms exposes our fixation upon ourselves and teaches us one psalm after another to shift our attention away from the world (1 John 2:15-17) and to focus on the Lord who redeems and empowers us in the world.

Where we praise the Lord is expressed in two parallel lines that encompass earth and heaven. To praise God in his sanctuary has a range of meanings. In the Hebrew text it may mean "in his holiness" or "sanctity." In the Greek version, which is plural, it may mean "in his holy places" or "among his saints."⁵ The psalmist's description of where we ought to praise the Lord recalls Abraham Kuyper's famous line, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!" Worship is not

⁴ Allen, Psalms, 324.

⁵ Ross, Psalms, 961.

limited to a specific space that has been set aside for congregational worship but is everywhere, because God is present everywhere in earth below and in heaven above. To praise God “in his mighty heavens” is to summons the entire cosmos to praise. The psalmist’s thought anticipates Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus said, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). In the spiraling intensity of the Book of Revelation worship on earth is in synch with worship in heaven and both are in tandem with the sovereign will of God (Rev 11:15-19). George Herbert said it well,

Let all the world in every corner sing,
my God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
his praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!⁶

Why we praise the Lord needs only the briefest statement. The psalmist gives two reasons, “for his acts of power” and “for his surpassing greatness.” Everything that the Psalter has declared about the Lord can be encompassed by his “mighty acts” and “immense greatness.” Who God is and what he has done in creation and redemption is included in these two reasons for praise. Ross writes, “The praise will declare God’s power and greatness as displayed through his marvelous works – creation, redemption, judgment, deliverance, healing, forgiveness, to name but a few that the Psalter has proclaimed.”⁷ Implicit in these reasons for worship is the human response in prayer and praise. The human voice is raised in testimony and witness, declaring the power and goodness of the Lord.

How we praise the Lord receives the most attention in the psalm. The psalmist’s focus is on the full range of musical expression from loud, attention-getting, exclamatory instruments like the trumpet and cymbals, and tambourine dancing, to soft, reflective and meditative instruments like harp, lyre, strings, and pipe. Seven instruments are named in the psalmist’s symphony of praise. They represent the three major musical groups, wind, strings, and percussion. The trumpet or ram’s horn announced the worship gathering. The dancers in the processional danced to the rhythm of the tambourines. The stringed instruments and the shepherd’s pipe accompanied the human voice in song. The variety of instruments with their different sounds impressed Augustine as representative of the diversity of saints. The “sweetest harmony arises from sounds differing indeed, but not opposed to one another.”⁸ The loud clash of cymbals brought the worship experience to a crescendo. Augustine reasoned, “Cymbals touch one another in order to sound,” therefore we need each other to give praise to God.⁹

⁶ George Herbert, “Let All the World,” in *The Worshipping Church*, Hope: 1990, 24.

⁷ Ross, *Psalms*, 966.

⁸ Augustine, *Psalm 150*, 683.

⁹ Augustine, *Psalm 150*, 683.

Who then, is summoned to praise the Lord? The answer to that question has been delayed until now for emphasis. But it is no surprise. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord” (Ps 150:6). Universal praise is the goal not only of Psalm 150, but of the entire Psalter. Ultimately, “every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10-11). The arc of history will climax in total praise and the apostle John’s vision will be realized: “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!’” (Rev 5:13). Until then we live between the Hallelujahs our lives framed from beginning to end in praise to the Lord.

Having come to the end of Psalms, what shall we do but begin again. We agree with T. S. Eliot: “We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.” No matter how many years we pray and study the psalms they never cease to inspire, instruct, challenge, and comfort. They give us the words we need to express our praise and our pain. Luther summed it up well when he said, “Who would even dare to assert that anyone had completely understood a single psalm?”¹⁰ The finite text of one hundred and fifty psalms yields infinite truth and praise.

¹⁰ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 750. Luther, *Selected Psalms*, 3:284.