

**SEA MONSTERS, CREEPY THINGS,  
AND CHILDREN  
Psalm 148**

Today we conclude our sermon series on the Psalms with Psalm 148: Sea Monsters, Creepy Things, and Children.

Psalms, as we discovered, is a large collection of poems in the Hebrew Bible. While each poem or song stands individually, together they are woven into a beautiful whole that tells the story of God's people. The Book of Psalms, in beautiful poetry and song, re-tells the entire biblical story, the story of ancient Israel.

Today we come to the last section of this songbook, the conclusion, comprised of five-songs of praise. Each of these final songs begins and ends exactly the same way: "Praise YAH," with YAH being short for Yahweh, God's name given to Moses at the burning bush.

Today, we might hear someone say "hallelujah" to communicate their praise God. And that's okay. But actually, in these final psalms (146, 147, 148, 149, 150), "Hallelujah" isn't addressed to God at all. In Hebrew, "Hallelujah" is what you say to other people when you're inviting them to join you in praising God. It's a call to God's people to engage in praising the Lord. It's not really a praise in itself. In fact, in this psalm alone, the verb "to praise" occurs ten times, most often in the form of a command (8 out of 10): "Praise the Lord!" The psalmist is calling upon us, commanding the people of God to praise Him.

Outlining this psalm, there are two big pieces to the poetic puzzle. The first half begins with v. 1 and runs through verse 6. The second half is vs. 7-14. In the first half of the song, the heavenly sphere above and all the inhabitants therein are called upon to praise Yahweh. In the second half, all the inhabitants of the earthly sphere below are called to do the same. Combined, the heavenly hosts and earthly creatures are all (and I do mean all), from the highest heavens to the ocean depths, called upon to join the chorus praising the Creator.

Let's read vs. 1b-6

Praise the Lord from the heavens' Praise Him in all the heights!

Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!

Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light!

Praise Him, highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for He commanded and they were created.

He has also established them forever and ever; He has made a decree which will not pass away.

The ancient Near Eastern world view typically had a three-dimensional, three-tiered understanding of reality: there is heaven, there is earth, and there is the realm under the earth (or Sheol). In Psalm 148, however, only the first two tiers are referenced. Everything in heaven and on earth is called upon to praise Yahweh. But not the realm of the dead, for Psalm 115 and Psalm 6 have already told us it is not the dead who praise the Lord, not those who go down to the place of silence (Psalm 115:17; 6:5).

Let's look at this big view of God. God is entirely and completely distinct from all creation. As envisioned in Psalm 148, God is not in the heavens or even the highest of heavens. Rather, He is over and above all parts of creation, the heavens included. And, therefore, all creation, from the highest heavens to the ocean depths (and everything in-between), is called upon to engage in rightful worship of the one true God. The angels are to praise Him – all the angels. All His hosts, His heavenly armies. The sun, the moon, and all the stars. Even the highest heavens are called to praise their creator.

Notice the repetitive use of “all” in this song. If you think you're not supposed to praise the Lord to fulfill your purpose, you couldn't have missed the mark any greater. We exist, we are created to spend eternity praising the only One who is worthy. Notice v. 2: “*all* his angels.” Verse 2 again: “*all* His hosts!” Verse 3: “*all* stars of light.” Verse 7: “*all* deeps.” Verse 9: “*all* hills,” “*all* cedars.” Verse 11: “*all* peoples.” Verse 11: “*All* judges.” *All*, meaning each and every one, is called upon to praise the One, the only One who is worthy of our words of worship.

But don't think for a moment that your silence or your refusal to fall at the feet of the One who created you in any way diminishes His power or His glory. As C. S. Lewis said, “A man can no more diminish God's glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling the word ‘darkness’ on the walls of his cell.”

You see, idolatry is foolish. It's foolish to worship creation rather than Creator (to worship another person, or to worship at the altar of greed; to worship sports, or bow at the altar of beauty). Rather, the chief end of humanity is clearly to glorify and to praise God and to enjoy Him for all eternity.

As he calls upon all creation to join the chorus of praise, the psalmist offers reasons for our accolades.

Notice verses 5-6 for the first reason. We praise God because He created.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, **for** He  
commanded and they were created.  
He has also established them forever and ever; He  
has made a decree which will not pass away.”

Notice this little particle, “**for**” or “because.” God spoke and all was created. He uses the same Hebrew word (*bara*) in Genesis 1. The emphasis is on God's potent speech that bring things to life. God spoke and all that is emerged. And, thus, He is sovereign over all that He has created.

Eugene Peterson write, “**Is wonder-induced gratitude the most fundamental of human responses, the emotion most congruent with life? Johnny Berman was a young man in my congregation. He and his wife were enthusiastic participants, but then the weeds of worldly care choked their young faith. They acquired children; they became suddenly wealthy and their lives filled up with boats and cars, house-building and social engagements. They were in worship less and less frequently and then not at all. After a two-year absence, on a bright winter Epiphany Sunday, Johnny was there again. Surprised to see him, I said, ‘Johnny! What brought you to worship today?’ He said, ‘I woke this morning feeling so good, so**

**blessed, so alive – so created I just had to say thank you, and this is the only place I could think of to say it adequately. I wanted to say it to Jesus.”** (Eugene H. Peterson, “Birthing,” *Christian Century*, January 6-13, 1999)

Having heralded the heavenly bodies to praise God in vs. 1-6, in verses 7-14, He turns to call upon all earthly creatures, great and small, to join the chorus of praise to their Creator.

Praise the Lord from the earth, sea monsters and all the deeps;  
Fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word;  
Mountains and all hills; fruit trees and all cedars;  
Beasts and all cattle; creeping things and winged fowl;  
Kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth;  
Both young men and virgins; old men and children,  
Let them praise the name of the Lord.

You remember back in Genesis 1:7 that Yahweh created the firmament and separated the waters above from the waters below. Here, in Psalm 148, we find a reference to the Creation narrative. Look at verse 4: “The waters that are above the heavens.” And now, beginning in verse 7, we have waters below the earth. And contained in the water below are sea creatures, and the ocean depths are simply called “the deeps.”

In the larger, conceptual world of the ancient Near East, these sea creatures appeared alongside other sea monsters such as the Leviathan, the crocodile, or behemoth. These creatures inhabit the primeval, chaotic waters and assault and disrupt the order of the world of the gods in the ancient Near East. And even in the literature of ancient Israel, there is a flavoring of the cultural traditions of the larger Eastern culture. In Psalm 74, Leviathan (“monster in the water,” NIV) is a source of chaos, mentioned by name. And Behemoth (a hippo or other colossal water dweller), as a menacing threat, appears in Job 40:15-24.

And yet, in Psalm 148, the roles of these sea monsters, these colossal sea creatures, have been altered considerably. They are no longer monsters to be feared. In the presence of the Creator, they no longer cause chaos but, rather, make a constructive contribution to the world of Yahweh’s creation. These objects of the deep have been stripped of their alleged powers and have been (alongside the snow and the clouds and the mountains and the hills) exhorted to raise their voices in praise to the one God who reigns over all.

After dealing with the monsters dwelling in the deep, he moves to fire (or lightning), hail, snow, and clouds. These four meteorological phenomena (v. 8), along with Amarillo’s favorite (wind), relate to precipitation, with the chief beneficiary being the earth below. The very winds that blow and the storms that brew are the result of God’s bidding (look at v. 8c), fulfilling His word.

After declaring that the deep and the creatures therein, the weather, and the wind are all called upon to praise their creator, he moves next to nature and animals. Mountains and all hills. Fruit trees and all cedars. Beasts and all cattle. Creeping things and winged fowl.

In some ancient Near East texts, the mountains were understood as the home of the gods (with a little g). The psalmist takes the mythology out of these mountains and says they are actually terrains that declare the song of Yahweh. Fruit trees represent cultivated vegetation, pruned and preserved by humanity. And the cedars, so tall, of Lebanon – 130 feet tall – sway and praise their creator. Between the fruit trees and the cedars, all of vegetation has a voice of praise.

And not only plant life shall praise Him, but the animals that dwell upon the earth, too. I want you to notice: beasts and all the cattle, creeping things and winged fowl (v. 10). “Beasts” means the wild animals. The “cattle” stands for domesticated animals. Next, the crawling creatures and the flying fowl.

Do you remember when the animals were about to board the boat in Noah’s story? We’re given in Genesis 7:14 the exact taxonomy of creatures. In Genesis 7:13, we learn that Noah and his family entered the ark, and then, “every beast after its kind” (our wild animals) and “all the cattle after their kind” (our domesticated animals), and “every creeping thing that creeps on the earth after its kind” and “every bird after its kind.” Together, both in Genesis and in Psalms, these four categories represent animal life in its totality.

Finally, just like Genesis has its apex, its climax, its monumental moment in the creation of humanity – made in the very image of God, so this psalm saves humanity for the final verse. Thus, following the flow of Genesis 1, we, at last, come to humanity. Notice the reference (v. 11): “Kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; both young men and virgins; old men and children.” What he is saying is this: Those with power (both near and far) are called upon to praise the God of Israel. And not just people of power, but all folks – both young men and young women. And then notice “old men.” It really is the adjective old with the masculine plural suffix, which probably means “everyone” – not just men, but the elderly.

But it’s not just the elderly; it’s the children, as well. All are to praise the Lord. If you’re breathing, you need to be praising Him, because those who love Him will spend eternity in His adoration.

What began with the songs of the angels (v. 2) ends with a chorus of children (v. 12).

There is a second reason we are given to praise Him – not simply for creating us (v. 5). There is another particle here. We are to praise the Lord, for His name, alone, is exalted (v. 13). N.T. Wright said, “The closer you get to the truth, the clearer becomes the beauty and the more you will find worship welling up within you.”

Now it’s not His role as Creator, but it’s His royalty that prompts our praise. Because He is royal, we praise Him. Yahweh is to be praised because He is above earth and above the heavens. He is to be exalted. It’s the stem of the word “to be fortified,” to be inaccessibly high. Yahweh is lifted so high, He is unassailable and impregnable to the forces of creation, because He alone is the Divine King.

Sara Maitland has said, **“So, as it turns out, we do not have a little, tame, domestic God, thank God, but we do have a huge, wild, dangerous God – dangerous, of course, only if we think that God ought to be manageable and safe; a God of almost manic creativity, ingenuity and**

**enthusiasm; a Big-Enough God, who is also a supremely generous and patient God; a God of beauty and chance and solidarity – or, one could say, an Extreme God. (Sara Maitland, *A Big-Enough God*)**

We're given yet another reason, a third, to worship Him. Look at verse 14: "He has lifted up a horn for His people." In Psalm 92:10, the psalmist writes, "You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox. I have been anointed with fresh oil." The metaphor of the exalted horn comes from the image of a bull lifting up his horns after winning the battle. The raised horn is a common biblical symbol of victory, especially of being rescued from oppression. Psalm 89:24 says, "My faithfulness and My lovingkindness will be with him" (God speaking), "and in My name his horn will be exalted."

In Psalm 112, we have prosperity for the one who fears the Lord (112:9): "He has given freely to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted in honor." This is a metaphor of victory. When God exalts the horn of someone, He is bringing victory to the oppressed.

In 1 Samuel 2, we find Hannah rejoicing in song after the birth of her son, Samuel. After years of infertility, Hannah rejoices because "in the Lord, her horn is lifted high" (1 Samuel 2:1). She continues her song by asking God to judge all of creation. And she ends that song by saying, "He will give strength to His king and will exalt the horn of His anointed," meaning the Messiah.

Remember, Psalms re-tells the story of the Hebrew Bible. It's the story of God's promise to raise up a king who will bring victory to God's people and rescue the world. God will raise up this horn, this Messiah, for his people – this horn of which the psalmist writes and of whom Hannah sings.

After Hannah's song, many years later we have two more songs of praise in the Bible. The first is Mary's song. Like Hannah, Mary rejoices over the baby in her womb, marveling at God's might and His mercy. She praises Him for being a righteous judge who humbles the proud and exalts the humble. Why, Hannah had sung the same song back in 1 Samuel 2. Mary concludes her song by proclaiming that God has remembered His covenant with Abraham, He has remembered His promise of the Messiah (Luke 1:54-55).

The next song comes in the same chapter of Luke. The song comes from Zacharias, who has just held his son, John the Baptist, in his arms. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Zacharias sings, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant." Zacharias's song for his son who will pave the way for the long-awaited horn of salvation.

We praise God, for He creates.

We praise God, because He alone is worthy to be exalted.

We praise God, because He sends the Savior, the Messiah. He lifts up the horn of salvation for His people.

This psalm, interestingly, ends the very way it began. It ends with the same word, “Hallelujah,” a call for all to praise the Lord.

In Psalm 148, all creation is engaged in celebratory acknowledgment that God gives life, that God is worthy of being exalted, and that God is saving His people. This is a cosmic doxology. You see, before the church can be the caring people of God, we have to begin acknowledging God for who He is. When we begin our way with God – in praising, rejoicing, surrendering, and obeying, when we know who God is and who we are – we can address our neighbors with care and compassion, knowing that the age to come is quite safe in God’s mercy.

Let’s re-translate the psalm now that we know the setting.

Join me in praising the Lord, yes you!  
Praise Him in all the highest heavens.  
Praise Him all angels and all of heaven’s armies.  
Praise Him sun and moon;  
Praise Him all stars of light, and rain clouds, too.  
He spoke, and you became;  
At His command, you were created and sustained.

Praise Him all the earth, even sea monsters and all oceans deep.  
Join our chorus lightning bolts, hail stones, snow, and tornadoes, following His voice alone.  
You, too, mountains and each and every hill, apple orchards and all tall trees.  
Praise Him wild beasts and herds of cattle;  
Join in snakes below and birds above.  
Let every animal on the ark sing His song.  
Kings of the earth praise Him;  
And people of poverty, too.  
Big folks and little folks, all sing His song of praise.  
Yes, young and old both, be bold and praise Him.  
Let all of these and more praise Him, because His name is worthy.  
Why, His glory is above the earth and beyond the heaven.  
He will lift the horn of His Messiah, who will save.  
Praise from all who love God,  
Even the sons of Israel who are close to His heart.  
Join me, yes you, praise the Lord.

-----  
Sources used:

Walter Bruggemann, *The Collected Sermons of Walter Bruggemann*.

The Bible Project, Psalm 148

W. Dennis Tucker, Jr. and Jamie A. Grant, *The NIV Application Commentary, Psalms, Vol. 2*