

Introduction

Earlier in the service, we read the first and last verses of the closing chapters of the Psalms, chapters 146-150. I asked you to note as we did what those chapters have in common. Can someone tell me what that is? It's that each begins and ends with the same imperative sentence, **"Praise the LORD,"** the word **"LORD"** being God's personal name, Yahweh. The Holy Spirit, in other words, purposely closes out this book He wrote, emphatically, with the command to praise Yahweh. That implies several things one of which is this. Praising Yahweh is a central activity for living interactively with Jesus and His kingdom at hand. So, let's learn how to praise Him as much and as well as we can.

Praising Yahweh Is Commanded

The first thing we need to do is define praising Yahweh. Psalm 9:1-2 helps us do that. It instructs us to **"exalt"** in Him and to **"tell all"** His **"wonders."** Those instructions reveal the two springs of praise, His person and works. They also reveal the two actions of praise: exalting and telling. Those springs and actions, together, define praise. We adore Yahweh's person and works *in and of themselves*, apart from their benefits to us, which distinguishes praising Him from thanking Him. We then express our adoration to Him and others with our bodies, primarily our tongues. That's praising and Yahweh commands us to do it.

I'd quickly note it disturbs many people that He does. I once met with a bright young Harvard graduate who was considering Christianity. He had several intellectual problems with it though, one of which was this, **"God's command to praise Him seems arrogant and conceited to me."** C.S. Lewis had the same problem. He called it a **"stumbling block"** as he **"drew near to belief in God."** He thought of it in these terms. God is like a dictator, millionaire, or celebrity who demands continued assurances of his greatness. And Christians are like the hangers-on of those people who gratify their demands. Lewis went

on to say: **“Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and His worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind.”**

Were that Harvard graduate and Lewis right? Is Yahweh just a pompous and self-exalting cosmic King? Are we just His self-serving flatterers and hangers-on, His toadies? The answer is a resounding **“No.”** The fact is that He neither needs nor craves our praise. It does please Him greatly because He loves us but He doesn't need or crave it.

He states just that in Psalm 50:12, **“If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all it contains.”** He isn't speaking literally because, as we all know, He doesn't get hungry or eat. His metaphorical point is this. There's nothing lacking in Him at all that needs filled. He has no *necessary* relation to anyone or anything outside Himself. He needs nothing from anyone or anything.

That includes praise from people. Imagine a human being needing and craving the praise of the slugs in his garden. That's laughable. But Yahweh is infinitely further above us than we are above the slugs. So, He needing and craving our praise is even more laughable. It's ludicrous.

Why then does He command it? It's because of the very nature of praise itself. The Psalms teach us two things about the nature of praise.

Praise Is Becoming

First, it's becoming. We see that in 147:1, **“Praise Yahweh! For it is pleasant and praise is becoming.”** The Hebrew word translated **“becoming”** means **“fitting,”** that is, consistent with reality. It's fitting to praise Yahweh, which implies that it's unfitting not to.

An acquaintance of mine had the privilege of hearing the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. He said everyone stood when the concert was over and gave it a thunderous ovation. That response, praising the orchestra and its concert, is becoming. It's consistent with reality, with the excellence of the orchestra and what it did. The audience, therefore, is sensible and even noble in praising.

But suppose the audience doesn't praise. It hears an extraordinary

concert by one of the world's best orchestras and after it's over, sits there indifferently, like a bump on a log. That response is unbecoming. It's inconsistent with reality, with the excellence of the Orchestra and what it did. The audience, therefore, is insensible and even ignoble in not praising.

It's like that with Yahweh. He is the absolute apex of excellence. He's the only utterly lovely and utterly competent being who exists and everyone and everything else pales in comparison to Him. Consequently, praise is becoming. It's consistent with reality, with the excellence of Yahweh's person and works. Those who praise, therefore, are sensible and noble in doing so. In contrast, not to praise is unbecoming. It's inconsistent with reality, with the excellence of His person and works. Those who don't praise, therefore, are insensible and ignoble in not doing so. There's no doubt about it. Praise is becoming.

Praise Completes Joy

The Psalms teach us a second thing about the nature of praise. It's the completion of joy.

I'd like to ask you a question. After the Bible, what is my favorite book? That's right. It's *The Divine Conspiracy*. Who is my favorite author? That's right again. It's Dallas Willard who wrote *The Divine Conspiracy*. How do you know that about me? It's because I've mentioned how extraordinary that book and author are so many times that you're probably sick of hearing about them.

That illustrates something Robert Vrabel said two Wednesday nights ago after Bible study. The world rings with praise: lovers praising beloveds, readers praising authors and books, fans praising teams, eaters praising food, parents praising children, art lovers praising paintings, and so on. It's true. The world rings with praise.

There's a reason it does. It's because people just naturally praise what they truly enjoy. It isn't that they have to. It's that they want to. Truly enjoying something spontaneously overflows into praising it. I

don't rave about Dallas Willard and his books because I have to or even because it's unbecoming not to. I rave about them for the same reason I rave about Cracker Barrel pancakes. I enjoy them so much that I can't help but praise them. It drives my wife crazy sometimes and I try to control it, but I often don't.

It's the same way with Yahweh. Excellent. Amazing. Extraordinary. Outstanding. Spectacular. Remarkable. Stunning. Mind-boggling. Astonishing. Incredible. Those words don't do justice to Him. He's totally, absolutely, completely, and utterly awesome. And because we know Him, our souls are "**satisfied as with marrow and fatness,**" to quote Psalm 63:5. So, we naturally praise His person and works. It isn't because we have to or because it's unbecoming if we don't. It's because we want to. We so adore His person and works that we can't help ourselves. We can't help but praise them.

And it's good we do because praise is the completion of joy. The joy we get from someone or something is incomplete until we praise. Our praise doesn't just express our joy; it completes or consummates it.

That's why cranks, who don't praise things, lose so much. They miss out on something great. C.S. Lewis explained their misfortune this way: "**The incomplete and crippled lives of those who are tone deaf, have never been in love, never known true friendship, never cared for a good book, never enjoyed the feeling of the morning air on their cheeks are faint images of it.**" He was right. The incompleteness of not praising is like the incompleteness of being tone deaf or color blind. Cranks teach us that praise completes joy.

We've all experienced that haven't we? We see a beautiful sunset, hear a good joke, read an outstanding book, listen to a lovely song, view an extraordinary work of art, watch a meaningful movie – and there's no one with whom to share it, and it's disappointing. Yes, we've had the joy of the thing and it's good, but it's incomplete because we have the psychological need to share it. Praise doesn't just express our joy; it completes it. It consummates it. So, when I pay my check at Cracker

Barrel and the cashier asks me, "**Was everything good,**" I reply, "**No,**" and after pausing add, "**It was spectacular.**" Praising the pancakes completes my joy – makes it double joy.

It's the same with Yahweh and His works. The depth of our joy is completed when we praise Him and them. Remember the old Double Mint Gum jingle: "**Double your pleasure, double your fun with Double Mint, Double Mint, Double Mint Gum.**" That's something like what we experience when we praise the person or works of Yahweh. The joy we get from Him and them is consummated. It's doubled.

Praise the LORD

We now know what Psalms teaches about the nature of praise. It's becoming and it's the completion of joy. It only makes sense, therefore, to praise and that's what the verses we read call us to do. Praise the person and works of Yahweh! We want to praise as much and as well as we should of course and I'd like to explain the key to doing that.

Let's go back to a principle we learned. Praising is consistent with reality, with the excellence of Yahweh and of His works. That means that the more details we know about Him and them, the more and the better we'll praise. That's the key to praising as much and as well as we should. Learn the details of Yahweh's excellence and of the excellence of His works. We learn that by doing two things.

First, think logically. We use the logical relations of implication and contradiction scores of times every day. But here we apply them specifically to the person and works of Yahweh. We do three things. #1 - Learn a particular fact that the Bible teaches about Him or them. #2 - Ask a question, "**If this fact is true, what other facts must also be true?**" #3 - Answer the question by applying the logical relations of implication and contradiction to the fact. Let me illustrate.

The Bible teaches a fact. Yahweh has infinite power. Infinite power implies that He never has more or less power, which implies He had no less power after creating the universe than He did before, which implies

that He created the universe effortlessly, which implies it took less effort for Him to create the universe than for us to move a finger. Those are mind-boggling details that compel us to praise Him. Think logically.

We do a second thing to learn the details of Yahweh's excellence, and the excellence of His works. Think metaphorically. We do two things. #1 - As I've already said, learn a particular fact that the Bible teaches about Him and them. #2 - Use comparisons to understand the fact more thoroughly. Determine how the fact is like or unlike something else in common experience. Relate that fact to that something else.

The Bible teaches a fact. Jesus came to earth in the flesh, as a human to save humans. We relate that fact to something in common experience: humans and slugs. Jesus is further above us than we are above slugs. Thus, He becoming a human to save humans is more sacrificial than you or I becoming a slug to save slugs. That is a gripping detail that compels us to praise that work of His.

The Bible teaches a fact. Yahweh is holy, a special and separate kind of reality. We relate that fact to something in common experience: the number "1". "1" is unique, in nature, among all numbers. It's singular and all the others are plural. Yahweh is as unique, in nature, among all of reality as "1" is among all numbers. He's literally the only one of His kind. That's a stirring detail that compels us to praise Him.

So there you have it, the key to praising as much and as well as we should. Grasp the details of Yahweh's excellence and the excellence of His works by thinking logically and metaphorically.

Conclusion

I close with the words of Richard Baxter: "**Be much in that angelic work of praise. As the most heavenly spirits will have the most heavenly employment, so the more heavenly the employment the more it will make the spirit heavenly.**" He was right. Praise is a heavenly activity. And the more and the better we do it, the more heavenly we ourselves will become in thought, feeling, and deed. The moral is clear. Disciples and friends of Jesus, "**Praise the LORD!**"