

## Psalm 148

*translation by Robert Alter*

Hallelujah.

Praise the LORD from the heavens,  
praise Him on the heights.

Praise Him, all His messengers,  
praise Him, all His armies.

Praise Him, sun and moon,  
praise Him, all you stars of light.

Praise Him, utmost heavens,  
and the waters above the heavens.

Let them praise the LORD'S name,  
for He commanded, and they were created.

And He made them stand forever, for all time.  
He set them a border that could not be crossed.

Praise the LORD from the earth,  
sea monsters and all you deeps.

Fire and hail, snow and smoke,  
storm wind that performs His command,

the mountains and all the hills,  
fruit trees and all the cedars,

wild beasts and all the cattle,  
crawling things and winged birds,

kings of earth and all the nations,  
princes and all leaders of earth,

young men and also maidens,  
elders together with lads.

Let them praise the LORD'S name,  
for His name alone is exalted.  
His grandeur is over earth and the heavens.

And may He raise up a horn for His people,  
praise of all His faithful,  
of the Israelites, the people near Him.  
Hallelujah.

## Worshipping with All Creation

*Rev Prof Jeremy Begbie, Duke University*

I write this as the UK is just starting to emerge from the Covid-19 lockdown. Many have told me how in the last few months they have begun to see and hear things they never noticed before. The bird chorale at 5 in the morning, the rippled bark on that beech tree at the bottom of the road, Kermit-green nettles swaying in the wind, bees hovering over wildflowers. As the roar of the roads retreats, and life's pace slows (at least for some of us), we have re-discovered the world around us.

A wise writer said, 'Our lives are made from the things we pay attention to.'<sup>1</sup> Psalm 148 pictures things we've seen a hundred times before (apart from angels, perhaps!). Sun, moon, stars, fire, snow, frost – all very familiar. But the psalmist makes us look – not merely see, but look, attend, pay attention to what they're doing.

They all praise God. All creatures – notice how the word "all" keeps appearing – the totality of things in the heavens (1-4) and on earth (7-12). They all praise the Creator.

How? Simply by doing their own thing in their own way. Take "fruit trees" (9). A fruit tree praises God by being itself, doing what fruit trees do best – growing, flowering, producing fruit. And the same applies to mountains and hills, creeping things and birds – the whole teeming lot. Every day we are surrounded by a vast, uncontainable, ceaseless hymn of praise, each creature glorying God in its own way. And this is going on whether we see it, hear it, notice it, acknowledge it or not.

Why does the Psalmist want us to notice this cosmic praise? Above all, because we're reminded who is at the centre of things. It's perilously easy to think creation needs us to praise God, like the vicar who can't believe his people can worship God without him. Here humans are not centre stage. They're only mentioned in the last three

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, Lucy, 'Noticing Nature Is The Greatest Gift You Can Get From Lockdown' in The Guardian, 16 May 2020

verses (11-14). Yes, you and I have a unique role in God's world – we can know we are loved by God, and can magnify and extend the praise of creation – through farming, industry, art and music. But we are not the pivot around which all else revolves. God is the one to be worshipped, and the cat in your sitting room and the robin at the bottom of the garden are quite able to praise God without us.

Just because God is at the centre, then, creation gives us a model of praise. Notice the Psalmist invites creation to praise God: "let them praise....!" That might seem a little odd, but it's a fitting image: the Psalmist is assembling 'the cosmic choir' (Richard Bauckham) and telling it to sing so we can learn from it. What does it mean to be a human being praising God? It means doing what we were created to do, not trying to be God. Like the fruit tree, even the wild animals and the cattle (10), we will never be more fully ourselves than when everything resonates with the Composer and speaks of him. Praise is more than a song, it's a way of life.

What this Psalm doesn't give us is any hint of what's gone wrong. There's no mention of nature's cruelty, no destructive disease, no Coronavirus. But this is where the New Testament takes us behind the scenes. There we learn that energising and directing this unstoppable praise is Jesus Christ, the one by whom, through whom, and by whom all things were made. We learn that the cosmic praise has turned sour, dissonant with evil. And we learn that the conductor of our praise has come to this world to take on that dissonance, to re-tune us back to God. Through him, a new music is now possible, richer than ever before, a symphony we can start to play now, but will only know beyond death.

"Our lives are made from the things we pay attention to." Yes, pay attention with the Psalmist to creation's praise, but do that by paying attention to the One at the heart of it all. Then our lives will indeed be made – in fact, re-made.

For Reflection:

Look around you at the cosmic orchestra of creation.

1. When did you last acknowledge the praise of creation?
2. Why do we often fail to notice creation's praise?
3. How does, for example, a flower praise God?
4. What does it mean to lead lives of praise?
5. In light of all this, what is the writer to the Hebrews telling us when he puts the words of Psalm 22 on Jesus' lips: 'In the midst of the congregation I will praise you.' (Heb. 2:12)?
6. How can you join creation in its ceaseless hymn of praise, here and now?

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