

Psalm 148: “All Creatures of our God and King...”

Reading of the Text (Psalm 148)

- 1 Praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD from the heavens;
Praise Him in the heights!
- 2 Praise Him, all His angels;
Praise Him, all His hosts!
- 3 Praise Him, sun and moon;
Praise Him, all you stars of light!
- 4 Praise Him, you heavens of heavens,
And you waters above the heavens!
- 5 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For He commanded and they were created.
- 6 He also established them forever and ever;
He made a decree which shall not pass away.
- 7 Praise the LORD from the earth,
You great sea creatures and all the depths;
- 8 Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
- 9 Mountains and all hills;
Fruitful trees and all cedars;
- 10 Beasts and all cattle;
Creeping things and flying fowl;
- 11 Kings of the earth and all peoples;
Princes and all judges of the earth;
- 12 Both young men and maidens;
Old men and children.
- 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory is above the earth and heaven.
- 14 And He has exalted the horn of His people,
The praise of all His saints –
Of the children of Israel,
A people near to Him.
- Praise the LORD!

Prayer for illumination

Heavenly Father, thank You for revealing Your Word to us. Please bless the preaching of Your Word for Your own glory, that it may build up the body of Your church. Let Your Word cut us to the quick, rearrange us and transfigure us into a new creation. These saints before me are the sheep of Your pasture. I confess that I am incapable of feeding Your sheep apart from the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Apart from You, I can do nothing; apart from You, we are nothing. But you have not left us alone to grope about in the dark without hope. Your Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. And this Word became flesh and dwelt

among us. In Your Son, Our Lord Jesus, is life, and the life is the light of men. He must increase; I must decrease. Grant me faithfulness, boldness, clarity, and humility. Grant the saints of this congregation ears to hear, discernment, understanding, and wisdom. Let us all believe your Word steadfastly. You have promised that it will not return void. We ask these things in Jesus' name through the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Introduction

There was a boy named Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it. He didn't call his father and mother "Father" and "Mother," but "Harold" and "Alberta." His vegetarian, non-smoking, teetotaler parents sent him to a pretentious, coeducational boarding school called Experiment House. Later on in the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, when Eustace stumbled into a dragon's lair, he didn't know what kind of place it was. You see, Eustace had read only the wrong books. They had a lot to say about exports and imports and governments and drains, but they were weak on dragons. How would Eustace have read the Bible?

I'm afraid that far too often, we—conservative evangelicals who hold fast to the truth of the Scripture—read the Bible, very Word of God, as if it were a book about drains or exports. In the modern age, we are prone to treat the Scriptures as if they were a system of abstract propositions. True propositions, of course; but just propositions. Give us a checklist of things to believe and a list of "do's and don'ts" and we'll be happy...

...or will we?

Some evangelicals see this oppressive modernism for the soul-deadening, life-sucking monstrosity that it is but react by embracing a kind of syrupy, squishy, evangellyfishy, Jesus-is-my-boyfriend treacle with twelve steps, three marriages, eight thousand people, and a Starbucks in the lobby. "What does this passage mean *to you*?" asks the flip-flop-wearing generation-exy guru with a "soul patch" while the keyboardist softly vamps the chorus of a praise ballad, and the religious marketing consultant nods in approval.

We are good at reacting to error by falling off the other side of the horse or embracing the caricature of our position. To the conservative, fundamentalist Christian, Genesis 1 is a series of true statements regarding the creation of the world and that's about all. Drains and exports. It's dangerous to think beyond that. The academic seeking the approval of his unbelieving peers emphasizes the literary structure, imagery, and poetry of Genesis 1.¹ No interpretation is out of bounds, except of course for creation over the course of six days about six thousand years ago. If you believe that in academia you don't get invited to parties and you're denied tenure. I strongly believe that God created the heavens and the earth over the course of six days about six thousand years ago. This is a hill I'm willing to die on², but if we believe that the *primary* purpose of Genesis 1 is

1 Most of the time they're wrong about the literary structure, imagery, and poetry as well. Because they emphasize a false dichotomy between poetry and history, they inevitably swallow camels and strain at gnats. For more on this, see James Jordan, *Creation in Six Days*, Canon Press, 1999.

2 Young earth creation is not a hill I'm willing to kill on though. If we are to reject the *prima facie* chronology of the Bible, it must be because that's what the Bible teaches and not because of the latest scientific fad. How many people have compromised away the first eleven chapters of Genesis because of the latest decree from some armchair philosopher in a white labcoat only to have that decree refuted a few years later?

to refute evolution or any other unbelieving fad, we've been robbed. The Bible is a book about dragons, giants, talking animals, magic, and heroes. We don't live in Eustace's world; we live in Reepicheep's. Psalm 148 reflects this.

Some psalms are psalms of praise. Others are enthronement psalms, creation psalms, or sabbath psalms. Psalm 148 has elements of all four. We're not sure who wrote the Psalm. Most scholars believe the Psalm was written after the return from exile because Psalm 147 speaks of God gathering together the “outcasts of Israel.”³ The only other place in the Old Testament where those Hebrew words appear together is Isaiah, so I don't think they make a convincing case. Also, Psalm 148 doesn't have redemption in the foreground as we would expect from a Psalm after the return from exile. I think that it was written during the reign of Solomon around the time the temple was dedicated because it makes the most literary sense there. The sabbath day praise that reflects back upon the six days of creation fits well with Solomon, the prince of peace that foreshadowed the greater Prince of Peace who came later. He was given rest on every side⁴ that he might build a House for the Name of Yahweh. Psalm 148 with its rich temple imagery, sabbath praise, and universal call to worship is consistent with the reign of Solomon. Even if I'm wrong about the history, I believe the similarities between Psalm 148 and the dedication of the temple provide a useful framework for understanding the Psalm.

Exposition and Applications

Who or what should praise God? The first twelve verses call “all creatures of our God and King” everywhere to praise Him. A broader call to worship is almost inconceivable. Abraham Kuyper once eloquently declared “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry 'Mine!'” This psalm doesn't limit itself to human existence, though. Psalm 148 calls *every fiber* of creation from the bottom of the ocean to the farthest star in the sky to the highest heavens to praise the true God. Even things that we don't ordinarily think of as capable of praising God are exhorted to do so. We have representatives of all six days, but unlike Psalm 104, a creation psalm, the six days are not presented in chronological order.

In the first four verses, the word “*hallelu*” or “praise” occurs eight times. This psalm is absolutely saturated with praise as we ought to be. This praise is like precious oil poured over the head of Aaron running down his beard and shoulders and like our baptism in the New Covenant. The poetry here paints a word picture of a glory-cloud of praise descending from heaven to earth, which should make us remember the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle and the temple⁵.

The worship of the angels in heaven which we catch glimpses of throughout Scripture⁶ is already at its

3 Hebrew דָּחַי יִשְׂרָאֵל (*dachah Yisra'el*) occurs in Psalm 147:2, Isaiah 11:12 & Isaiah 56:8. There isn't an internal indication that Psalms 147 and 148 were written by the same author. Was the writer of Psalm 147 referencing Isaiah, or was Isaiah referencing Psalm 147? Perhaps Isaiah wrote both.

4 1 Kings 5:4

5 Exodus 40 and 1 Kings 8

6 Job 38, Isaiah 6, Luke 15, Revelation 5

maturity. The angels and the highest heavens were created mature on the first day while the earth was dark, formless, and empty. Once the waters above the firmament in the highest heavens are divided from the waters below the firmament on the second day, the highest heavens are essentially complete. Earth, on the other hand, is to mature and become like heaven. This maturation over time from creation to glorification would have taken place even if Adam had not fallen. Adam's sin introduced the need for redemption. Apart from redemption, the culture of man is one of destruction. It is a ministry of darkness, chaos, and death. In prophecies and acts of judgment this theme of uncreation occurs. In a prophecy against Judah, Jeremiah declares, "I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light."⁷ When wickedness reached its maturity in the ancient world, God destroyed it by flood, saved Noah's family and brought about a new creation. From that point on, God promised to cut wickedness off in its youth. He reduced human lifespans, scattered the nations at Babel and divided the house of the serpent against itself that it might not stand.

The problems of darkness, formlessness and emptiness are being gradually solved as earth grows up to be more like heaven. The earthly host becomes more and more like the heavenly host. Newer covenants, each surpass the previous in glory and maturity as man moves from priest to king to prophet. Finally the greatest covenant of all comes when the Son of God becomes incarnate. Jesus is the Great High Priest, the King of Kings, and the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. When He ascends on high, He sends the Holy Spirit to indwell the new temple, His church and transform her into a bride without spot or wrinkle. This transformation in man is brought about by faithful worship and covenant renewal. Every time we assemble together to worship we are transformed and transfigured. In Christ we mysteriously ascend into the Highest Heavens and worship in the throne room of the living God. God calls and we respond. We confess and forsake our sins. He raises us out of the dust and ashes. We hear the Word, we Sing the Word, we eat the Word. He blesses us, commissions us, and sends us out into the world to transform it for His glory. As we shall see, man is not unique in that he worships – however, he is unique in that he becomes like what he worships. We live in a world where the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity became flesh and dwelt among us. We can't live as a faithful presence within this world – worshipping rightly – for long before eucatastrophes start happening. People start burning their spell-books, and before we know it, the Roman Emperor gets converted. Jesus Christ is building His Church and the gates of hell cannot stand against it. If you think that faithful Christianity won't affect culture, you're arguing that water flows uphill. I was going to say "you're arguing against gravity" but I'm actually going to do just that later on.

In verse three, the sun, moon, and stars of light are called upon to praise the Lord. These bodies in the firmament are the first creatures that are given rule in the Bible. The Holy Spirit Who had been providing light for the earth directly the first three days, delegates this responsibility to created luminaries for signs and seasons and for days and years. The greater light rules the day and the lesser light rules the night. They divide the light from the darkness and represent truths about the highest heavens to us in a visible manner. Since the fall of

7 Jeremiah 4:23

man, these luminaries have frequently been objects of idolatrous worship from sinful man who is constantly seeking to worship the creature rather than the Creator, exchanging the truth for a lie. The heavenly bodies are more than just flaming balls of gas. To be sure, this language is poetic, a personification, but we can often learn more truth from the poet than the philosopher. The firmament heavens declare the glory of God.⁸ They are always actively preaching a sermon to those who have ears to hear. We should not expect the created order to yield its secrets easily though. If Jesus spoke in parables to enlighten the righteous and confuse the wicked, we should not be surprised to see “general revelation” doing the same thing. Lady Wisdom must be courted; she enjoys laughing at fools.

In verse five, the reason for worshiping God that had been hinted at is stated plainly. “He commanded and they were created.” There are two aspects of the Genesis 1 creation account. The first, creation out of nothing, in the beginning of the first day cannot be emulated by creation, even by man who was created in God's image. We are always restructuring existing creation. After God created out of nothing, he laid hold of creation, restructured it, distributed it, evaluated it, and then enjoyed it on the Sabbath.⁹ God is to be praised for both kinds of creation, and man is to emulate the latter type of action with thanksgiving in his work. God didn't merely wind up the creation like a watch maker. He actively upholds it at all times. The statement “He established them forever and ever” must be understood in light of subsequent revelation. There will come a time in the New Jerusalem when there will be no need for the sun or moon to give light. Like the elders in Revelation 4, they will one day cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus and declare “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.” The decrees of the Triune God are indestructible. Our Lord declared “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Matt 24:35, Mark 13:31, Luke 21:33). Believe the Word of God. Believe the promises of God and do not doubt.

We now move to the earth. “Praise the LORD from the earth, You great sea creatures and all the depths.” The word translated here in the New King James Version as “great sea creatures” is the Hebrew word “*tanniyn*.” In the King James Version, the Geneva Bible and the Septuagint, this word is translated as “dragon.” Translators after the Enlightenment have predictably avoided translating this as “dragon.” They would translate it as “export” if they could get away with it. Sometimes they translate it as “jackal” which is just as vapid. (For our purposes, I'll just keep it untranslated.) Genesis 1 only uses the word “created” three times. The first is for His creation of the heavens and the earth out of nothing in verse 1; the third occurrence is for God's creation of man; the other occurrence is for God's creation of the wondrous and mysterious *tanniyn* on the fifth day. The *tanniyn* is the captain of the fifth day, but is not given rule like the luminaries or man. Interestingly, the *tanniyn* is also absent from the list of things Adam is given dominion over in verse 28. Now it's possible that man's dominion over them is implied, but I'm not sure either way. Perhaps Adam would have been given

8 Psalm 19

9 See James Jordan Through New Eyes, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1988, chapter 10.

dominion over the *tanniyn* once he grew in maturity. When Aaron casts down his rod before Pharaoh, it becomes a *tanniyn* that and swallows up the *tanniyn*-rods of the Egyptian enchanter. To clarify, the *tanniyn* is not the creature that appears to Eve in Genesis 3 or that strikes Israel in Numbers 21. They are *nakhash*, serpents. In Lamentations 4:13, the *tanniyn* draws out her breast to give suck to her young. The *tanniyn* are associated with powerful Gentile rulers,¹⁰ mournfulness, especially when paired with owls¹¹, and its den is a symbol of wilderness and desolation¹². What are we to make of these mysterious monsters, the *tanniyn*, the behemoth, the serpent, or the leviathan? As with the luminaries, I would submit that we should be quicker to trust the poet than the scientist on these things. Dragons have captured our imaginations from time immemorial. Don't deprive your children, especially your sons of the tales of heroes fighting dragons. While the dragons we fight may not be flesh and blood¹³, we will fight them. We must be trained to do so. Put on the armor of God and do battle. Sing psalms. Our Lord Jesus is the Great Dragon Slayer who crushed the head of the serpent. Read the great dragon battle in Revelation 12 and rejoice! Now we do not defeat dragons by acting like vain, proud classical heroes, but through the blood of the lamb. Be willing to lay down your lives for each other as Christ did for us—Pastor Liechty has just spent a year preaching what this looks like. It might be possible to be too strong on dragons and too weak on exports, but this is not the prevailing temptation in our culture today. Both modernism and post-modernism are weak on dragons.

Moving on, I had hinted earlier that I would argue against gravity, so here goes. Verse eight requires praise from “fire and hail, snow and clouds, stormy wind *fulfilling His word.*” Before I continue, I probably should clarify. I don't have a problem with using the words like “gravity” or even “luck” if they are shorthand for sovereign, active actions of the Triune God. When I drop a ball to the floor, it does not fall because of an impersonal force or scientific law acting upon it, it falls because it is obeying God. Very often the things listed in verse eight are agents of calamity and judgment. The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes¹⁴. The wind is free to always obey God. It struck the four corners of Job's son's house¹⁵, parted the Red Sea¹⁶ and blighted the seven thin ears of grain¹⁷. When we see earthquakes, hurricanes, or accidental, sudden deaths we should not emulate Job's friends like the callous Iranian cleric¹⁸ that declared confidently that earthquakes are immediately caused by immodesty. This doesn't mean that there is no sign or cause for acts of judgment, but our first response should always be to fall on our

10 Jeremiah 51:34, Ezekiel 29:3, Ezekiel 32:2

11 Job 30:29, Psalm 44:19, Isaiah 13:22, Micah 1:8

12 Isaiah 43:20, Jeremiah 9:11, Jeremiah 10:22, Jeremiah 51:37

13 Compare with Ephesians 6

14 John 3:8

15 Job 1:18-19

16 Exodus 14:21

17 Pharaoh's dreams, Genesis 41. That the blighting east wind contributed to the actual famine the dream envisions is a pretty safe inference.

18 Hojatoleslam Kazem Sedighi. See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1267262/Iranian-cleric-Women-wear-revealing-clothing-cause-earthquakes.html> Pat Robertson has been known to make equally callous pronouncements.

faces and declare “the LORD, He is God, the LORD, He is God” like those who watched the fire of God vindicate Elijah before the prophets of Baal¹⁹. The wise man sees an act of judgment, knows that it would have been just for God to do the same to him, and gives thanks. Job's friends should have said, “Job is the most righteous man I know. How much more do I deserve these calamities than he did?” God doesn't always reveal why he does certain things. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.²⁰” One of the things that God has revealed to us is that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.²¹” Do you believe this? Children, are you afraid of thunder? The thunder is so loud and powerful that I understand why you would be. But when a powerful storm and waves were beating against the boat, Jesus rebuked them and they were still instantly²². Thunder obeys the word of the LORD. Whenever you hear thunder, remember that Jesus is more powerful than the thunder. Whenever you're tempted to disobey your parents, remember that Jesus is more powerful than the thunder.

From verses eight to twelve we see pairings to show the universality of the call to worship. Fire and hail; snow and clouds²³. Next, every mountain, from the peak of Everest to the smallest ant hill is called to praise the LORD. Mountains are frequently places where God meets with his people. Altars are mini holy mountains. The tower of Babel and the pyramids of Egypt are counterfeit holy mountains. Mt. Moriah, Mt. Zion, Mt. Sinai, and the Mount of Olives are just some of the mountains where God meets with His people. But as wicked men can make idols of the luminaries, so they are also prone to idolatrous worship at high places. Trees are similar to mountains in their symbolic heaven-earth connection as pillars or ladders to heaven. Trees grow in postures of prayer. Both cedars and fruit trees are featured prominently in temple worship. The temple was built of cedar inlaid with gold. There were pomegranates featured in the artwork and on the pillars Jachin and Boaz. The fruit of the olive provided oil for lighting the lampstand and was included with the grain offering. Beasts and cattle are a contrast of wild and domesticated animals; creeping things and flying fowl are a contrast of low and high on the earth. Every beast from the lion to the lamb, from the earthworm to the eagle, is called upon to praise the LORD. If inanimate objects and beasts are called upon to do so, how much more should we who are created in God's image and likeness?

“Kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth.” Men and women everywhere regardless of their station are to praise the LORD. Three of the four groups mentioned here are rulers. What I'm about to say shouldn't be controversial, but we live in interesting times. Kings, princes, and judges are called to praise the LORD *as* kings, princes, and judges. These words are plural, not singular, and the phrase “of the earth” argues against any sort of limited view that only the kings of Israel were to praise, worship, and obey

19 1 Kings 18:39

20 Deuteronomy 29:29

21 Romans 8:28

22 Mark 4:35-41

23 Better translated smoke. The word smoke referring to Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:28 is the same Hebrew word.

God. The sea creatures, who frequently represent the Gentiles in the Old and New Testaments, were called to worship back in verse seven. The call to worship is evangelical. Israel was supposed to be a kingdom of priests that inspires all peoples to worship the true God. They largely failed in their mission and were subverted by the heathen. The church will succeed where Israel failed.

I think part of the reason why three of the four groups that are mentioned in verse eleven are rulers is because of their almost universal tendency toward pride. Let us look at a tale of two kings. Nebuchadnezzar ruled an empire from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea, all of Mesopotamia, and some of modern-day Turkey. One day he pridefully declared "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" When he said that, God turned him into a cow for seven years until he acknowledged him. God eventually softened his heart. Not so with Pharaoh. After each escalating plague, we read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Israel went out from Egypt a mixed multitude, so we can infer that after each one of these plagues some Egyptians were converted. Pharaoh knew that Jehovah was God, but that knowledge only made him more of a beast each time he was confronted with it. Are you too prideful to praise the LORD? If so, fall to your knees and cry out to God for deliverance! It is better for God to humble you now at any cost. Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords. The sun is risen, and we live in the light of day. If you will not bow the knee to Jesus Christ, then Pharaoh will rise in judgment against you on the last day.

"Praise the LORD, young men and maidens; old men and children." If you're sitting here today, this verse is probably the one you would put yourself in. Every person in every stage of life is to praise the LORD. That's what we're here for today. As the body of Christ, we are each edified by the interaction of the parts of the body. Actively seek fellowship with the saints here. You are not allowed to have stricter boundaries for fellowship than Jesus Christ. If there is somebody in the church who you have a hard time being in the same room with, this will not do. Confess your sin. If you can't cover a sin in love, confront it in love. Re-read The Peacemaker²⁴ first if you don't know how to go about it. Intentionally seek out fellowship with those around you. Practice hospitality here. If you see a visitor or someone who is standing alone pining for fellowship, don't just stand there! If you find yourself gravitating toward the same people every week after church make an effort to get to know some new people. Break generational barriers. Young men, I'm talking to you especially. Seek out the older men; draw upon their wisdom; sit at their feet.

Note that this verse specifically mentions old men and children. I don't believe there are two classes of people in American culture who are more despised than the elderly and children. I also don't believe there are two classes of people who scare Satan more in worship than the elderly and children. "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger."²⁵ Every time a child sings a psalm or joins us in an "Amen," we are casting down strongholds to the glory of God. But what do we see in America? Children are hurried away from as much of

24 Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, Baker Books, 2004.

25 Psalm 8:2

the worship service as possible, considered aliens of the covenant, and denied full participation in worship, especially baptism and the Lord's table. This is a recipe for following Europe into the abyss. For many of us, the full inclusion of our covenant children in worship is a major reason why we're here. Give thanks, praise the LORD. Likewise those elderly saints who have lived a lifetime of service to Jesus are tremendously valuable to the church. Sadly, the "contemporary worship" tendency in American Christianity has tended to alienate the elderly, who flee to age-segregated, and often geographically segregated settings.²⁶ It seems as if churches either have no one under seventy or no one over seventy. What a pity it is to be deprived of the experience and wisdom of these saints! How glorious it would be to some day see four or five generations worshipping together in the same body as the norm! How glorious it is to see Catherine and True worshipping together today!

The final two verses conclude the psalm by providing a recapitulation of the universal call to praise God. Like verses five and six, a reason is given for why we are to praise Him. In those verses we were told to praise God because He is the Creator. Now we are told to praise Him because His name is exalted and His glory is above the earth and heaven. In Psalm 148, we see a movement from creation to glorification that matches the overall flow of the Bible. How do we get from the Garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem? This is the story God is writing. To be sure, there are unexpected twists and turns along the way, and there are plot complications that need to be resolved. But redemptive history is not some depressing Swedish film²⁷. There may be parts of the story that we don't understand now, but God is a far better author than any of us are. His ways are higher than our ways. It would be utterly ridiculous for Mike Tyson to presume to give Cicero a lesson in rhetoric. The disparity between us and God is far greater.

Now why would we want glory? Is it so we can stroke our egos? Is it so that we can make a name for ourselves lest we be scattered upon the earth? Do we seek *our own* glory? No, this is vainglory. Rather, we seek glory so that we can offer it back to God. What do the elders do with their crowns in Revelation? Glory is not something we attain by striving after it for its own sake. It is not grasped by bravery in battle or by eloquence of speech. Real glory is bestowed upon us by our gracious heavenly Father. It is God Who lifts up the horn of His people in Christ. How did Christ attain glory? Paul tells us in Philippians. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father²⁸." We are to

26 It should be noted that many of the elderly are also to blame for some of this. They raised the generation(s) that alienated them. A man reaps what he sows. The 1950s were not some golden age we should seek to return to.

27 "The Seventh Seal," 1957, written and directed by Ingmar Bergman is what I'm referencing. I've heard that this is par for the course for Swedish films.

28 Philippians 2:5-11

imitate both Christ's method for receiving glory and His motivation for doing so.

Final Exhortations and Conclusion

Before we conclude, I must warn against some false ideas about praise. Just because you *say* you are praising God does not mean that you actually are praising God. Saul claimed he was praising God when he spared Agag and the best of the Amalekite flocks that God had told him to utterly destroy. What did Samuel tell him? “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.²⁹” I think most, if not all of us have experienced this to some degree. We were at the Lord's Service but we had some form of unconfessed disobedient sin weighing us down. That which should be sweet to us was like chewing gravel; that which gives life was like poison to us. We cannot worship God rightly while we are harboring sin. Disobedient “praise” is not praise. Beloved, if you are in this situation, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God, and make confession to Him (compare Joshua 7:19).

Likewise, ungrateful “praise” is not praise. Thankfulness and praise are joined at the hip. You cannot worship God in Spirit and in truth without being grateful for what God the Father has done for us in Christ. This should always be in the foreground of our consciousness. What do you have that you have not received?³⁰ If you are not thankful, you will be so puffed up and pompous that you will make Christianity a byword and an object of ridicule among the unbelievers. If ungrateful “praise” doesn't cause you yourself to apostatize, be warned that your children and grandchildren most likely will. Paul tells us what happens when you do not give thanks to God in the beginning of his letter to the Romans. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.³¹” This is where the path of thanklessness leads.

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, gnostic praise is not praise. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. He had a body. He still has a body. Human flesh is sitting at the right hand of the Father right

29 1 Samuel 15:22-23

30 1 Corinthians 4:7

31 Romans 1:18-25

now. I believe that many of the current controversies in Reformed circles today are really over the doctrine of the Incarnation and the implications thereof. I discussed some of the positive implications of this earlier. What happens when you deny the implications of the Incarnation in worship? Well, you just sit there. No kneeling; no standing; no singing. If the Lord's Supper is celebrated at all, it's done with a thimble full of grape juice and the "astronaut food" version of bread. Next the preaching follows suit and becomes to real preaching as grape juice is to wine. There are many churches in the West today where you would not be able to distinguish a sermon from the presentation of an academic paper at the university. "Faith" becomes some abstract Platonic form that need not manifest itself in human history as good works. Brethren, we are Christians, not Vulcans. Our bodies do not exist merely to transport our brains to and from church. If you think you can do theology without it erupting into doxology, your theology is wrong. Period. I don't care how many fat books with small type you've read. We are to worship the Triune God in light of the Incarnation, with our bodies as well as our minds.

Perhaps this sermon about praise has done nothing but beat you up. You look around and see everybody around you worshiping God, but you look inside your heart and see a valley of dry bones. You see those around you worshiping and you conclude (mistakenly) that they're all perfect and you're a lost cause. When you hear the grace of Jesus Christ preached, it just sounds like Super Law. You say to yourself. "I'm a mess. Why do I even bother to keep coming here when all I receive is condemnation?" Beloved, never forget that God raises the dead. In His wisdom, God has chosen to transform the world into a new creation by the apparent foolishness of preaching. Man becomes deaf, dumb, blind, and dead by worshiping idols. The preaching of the gospel makes the deaf to hear and the blind to see. It loosens the tongues of the dumb that they might praise the LORD. It gives everlasting life to the dead. Are you discouraged? Praise the LORD, for he raises the dead! Are you overwhelmed? Downtrodden? Burdened? Praise ye the LORD, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light³². Are you encouraged? Emboldened? Refreshed? Praise ye the LORD more and more and go out back out into the world to transform it for His glory. Let's pray.

Closing Prayer of Thanksgiving

Father Almighty, we thank You for calling us near unto You, for running after us while we were yet a long way off and throwing your arms around us. We ask that you would have us all remember whatever was true in this sermon preaching and forget whatever was false. If I have mishandled or misinterpreted Your Word in any way, please make me aware of it and forgive me, but even more importantly let it not lead any of Your sheep into error and unrighteousness. Help us to walk by faith and not by sight as we live in the world You have revealed to us in Your Word. Add more voices to the choir of praise, and help the world to grow more like heaven. We bring our prayer before Your throne in Jesus' name, Who taught us to pray... (Lord's Prayer)

32 Matthew 11:30