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Psalm 150
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To Final Breath

I think we would all agree that music has a way of impacting our soul. There are songs from my childhood that I can still sing by heart even though I hadn't sung them for years. Perhaps it was the latest hit of our favorite rock group that we heard on the radio. Or maybe a certain lp record that we played over and over and over...until our parents begged us to give it and them a rest. But as we listened to those tunes, the lyrics sunk deep into our soul and took root. When we talk about singing songs by heart, I think what we really mean, is that we sing them with our soul. And for some of us, our connection with music runs that deep.

There is a song that we sing in worship that touches those deep places within me. In Christ Alone. Based on the way we as a congregation belt it out, I believe it hits you in the same way. It's a song that spells out the fullness of the Gospel through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The last verse is what gets me teary.

No guilt in life, no fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till he returns or calls me home, here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

This verse gives witness to the bookends of life. From life's first cry to our final breaths, Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, controls it all. And because of that sure and certain knowledge planted in our hearts, we can live worshipfully between those bookends.

These past weeks, I've thought a lot about these bookends of life as I walked with Ken Bisbee and Beth Eggett in their final moments. This song gives me hope that Jesus Christ conquered all things, even death itself.

So as we complete our summer series on the Psalms, we are reminded of its bookends, Psalm 1 and Psalm 150.

Psalm 1 exhorted us in the way of the Lord that we should go. That if we delight in the Law of the Lord and meditate on it day or night, then we will be like trees planted by streams of water, which yield its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Psalm 150 tells us how we should go along that way of life. In total praise of God. Psalm 1 and Psalm 150 are bookends of our lives with God.

Prayer of Illumination. Let us pray.

There are several questions that I think Psalm 150 raises for us as worshipers. Where does worship begin? Does it begin with us or with God? Who is to be praised and why are they to be praised? Where is God to be praised? How is God to be praised? And who is to praise him?

So let's begin with that first question. Where does worship begin?

As we answer that question, we must be clear about one thing. Worship is already taking place in heaven. John describes the worship surrounding the throne of God when he was taken up to heaven in the Book of Revelation.

John writes, "In the center, around the throne of God were four living creatures...and day and night they never stop saying: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is and is to come."¹

So when we enter into worship, my friends, we are being caught up in the ongoing worship experience taking place in the heavenly realms.

Think of it this way.

Have you ever arrived at church later than you hoped and walked into the sanctuary as the opening songs were already being sung? We come in quietly and humbly, take our place in the congregation, and then best as we are able join in the ongoing worship. It's like a flowing river that never stops, we just get on our raft and go for a ride in the river's current. That's what eternal worship is like.

The problem sometimes in the church is that we think that we are the instigators of that worship. That worship begins at 10:15am and ends roughly at 11:30 or so each Sunday. And that God is a spectator God who approves or disapproves of the worship we bring. If that's our view of God and worship, then maybe our worship is more centered on ourselves and not on God.

We enter into worship, with fear and trembling, knowing that we are entering into something holy that God initiated and that is already going on.

But also know this...our actions have huge impact on the worship that takes place in heaven.

John continues, "Whenever the living creatures [that's you and me] give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever [that's Jesus], the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."²

¹ Revelation 4:8

² Revelation 4:9-11

When we worship God in the way we were created to worship, heaven erupts in more worship. That's super cool!!!!

Next, let's tackle who is to be praised? I'm sure some of are thinking, "Duh, Chris. It's God." True. But let's be more specific, because we live in a world of many gods. We worship THE TRIUNE LORD GOD whose sanctuary is above the vault of heavens, who rules over all things on earth, above the earth, and beneath the earth. The God above all gods!

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi to distinguish THE LORD GOD from all the pagan gods that surrounded them. He said that this God, Jesus Christ, was "exalted to the highest place and was given the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should 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."³

Paul then wrote to the Colossians, "This Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all of his fullness dwell in him and through him reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."⁴

The focus of our praise is THE TRIUNE LORD GOD, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we worship God the Father, we worship Jesus the Son. When we worship Jesus the Son, we worship the Holy Spirit. When we worship the Holy Spirit, we worship God the Father. That is who is to be praised!

But why is the TRIUNE LORD GOD to be praised?

Because we are commanded to do so! Look at the first and last verses or bookends of Psalm 150. "Praise the Lord!" This is an imperative, a command. Our worship is not conditional upon our life circumstances, nor does it depend upon how we feel at the moment. It doesn't even matter whether or not the music is our jive today. We can either jump into the waters of worship or stubbornly sit on the riverbank and miss out. But know this...

We are commanded to praise the Lord!

For what? Psalm 150 tells us, "For his acts of power and his surpassing greatness." Yes, we praise God for the great things he's done in our lives. How he

³ Philippians 2:6 -11

⁴ Colossians 1:15-20

delivered us from the evil one. How he provided for us when we were lost in the desert. How he healed our diseases. How he lifted us up from the messy pit we created for ourselves. All of these things are good and true acts of God.

The problem, however is when we focus so much on what God has done that we forget that God is to be praised simply for the fact that God is God and we are not!

In the Gospel of John, Jesus called out his disciples for missing this all important fact. Just after Jesus miraculously fed thousands and walked on water out to their boat, Jesus' disciples were looking for him. When they finally found him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill."⁵ In other words, you focus too much on what God can do for you and not enough on simply who God is.

"We are, as one writer puts it, like children who are more interested in the pennies that come from the father's hand than [the fact] they are in the father's hand. Don't despise the pennies. Don't be ashamed to accept the pennies. But don't lose sight of the hand that dispenses them either."⁶

My friends, our God is an awesome God. Our God is powerful. Our God is loving. Our God is kind. Our God is just. Our God is righteous. Our God is good.

We worship God for who God is. Not just because of his awesome works.

So let's move then to where is God to be praised? Psalm 150 says "In his sanctuary; in his mighty heavens."

I don't think that this is simply a reference to our temples constructed by human hands. Though we love this sanctuary where we come to worship together we know that our God is much bigger than this. God's sanctuary is the earth, the sky, and the galaxies that he created. Have you ever sat outside at night and watched the stars come out or a meteor shower take place? We are witnessing the celestial beings worship God in the splendor of his sanctuary as God calls them out each by name.

God is also to be praised in his mighty heavens. In other words, those limitless dimensions that are not constrained by time, matter or space because God is limitless. Psalm 22 says God inhabits the praises of his people.⁷ When we the Church gather and are caught up in worship to praise him, God is here.

⁵ John 6:26

⁶ John Koessler, "Hallelujah Chorus" sermon posted on Preaching Today Website at <https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2010/may/lessonsfrompsalms5.html>

⁷ Psalm 22:3

How is he to be praised? Psalm 150 clearly states through music and with all sorts of instruments. The sounding of the trumpet. The harp and lyre. The tambourine and dancing. The strings and flute. The clash of cymbals, resounding cymbals.

Isn't it cool that God provides such a vast array of instruments created to assist us in worship? Some instruments may hit our worship buttons more than others. But one is not better than another. Some of us may prefer the guitar, others the piano. Some may prefer a choir, others a worship team. Some of us may prefer hymns, others more contemporary songs. Some of us may prefer to use our voices, others our bodies in dance.

At Cascades, we worship through a variety of means so that we can worship together as one body. If there is anything we take away from today's sermon, I hope it is this...worship is so much bigger than us and our personal biases.

And finally, we ask who is to praise God? The final verse of Psalm 150 tells us, clearly... everything and everyone that has breath praise the Lord. This reference actually harkens back to the creation in Genesis. We are told that "After God created the living creatures to fill the earth, the sea, and the air, he formed the first human from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."⁸

Let's break this down a bit.

"God breathed into his nostrils." The Hebrew translates as. To breathe into. To impart. To give or give up life. "Breath of life." Breath or spirit. That which gives life to every living thing.

Again Psalm 150 says, "Every living thing that has the spirit of God in them. Praise the Lord!"

I'll leave us with this one last thought. The average person at rest takes 16 breaths per minute, 940 breaths per hour, or 23,000 breaths per day. If God is the one who gives this breath and if everything that has breath is called to Praise the Lord. And if breathing itself is an act of praise. Then we have 23,000 opportunities to praise God each day. This is what Psalm 150 invites us into...a lifestyle of worship and praise.

So may we see that Jesus Christ is the one who is be praised. May we remember that God looks at our hearts as worship. And while we have breath, may we always praise the Triune Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

⁸ Genesis 2:7