

The Instruments of Worship – Psalm 150
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Our language is filled with clichés, isn't it? Just listen to athletes who are interviewed after a game. The winners say things like: We came to play - We brought our A-game - We played our hearts out – nobody respected us, but we proved everybody wrong.

Things sound a bit different in the losers' locker room: We beat ourselves - We didn't get the job done - They wanted it more than we did - We didn't play with our hearts.

A cliché is really an overused metaphor that doesn't really mean anything, or help anyone. Here are some more that we hear on a regular basis: Time will tell - No news is good news - Live and let live - What goes around comes around - One step at a time - When at first you don't succeed, try, try again - Don't worry, be happy

We also use "Christian Clichés" far too often. While many of the things we say represent profound truth and real sentiments, religious jargon comes flying out of our mouths without much thought behind it. Terms and expressions like, "fellowship," "I'm praying for you," "Smile, Jesus loves you," "bless your heart," "the Lord never gives you more than you can handle" and even "Praise the Lord," can lose their impact because of overuse and repetition.

As we come to the end of the Book of Psalms, we notice that each of the last 5 Psalms begins with, "Praise the Lord," and each Psalm increases in praise and joy until we come to the last one in the holy hymnbook Psalm 150. For the psalmist, "praise the Lord" was definitely not a cliché but an ecstatic expression of unbridled joy! In six short verses, he uses the phrase 13 times. Every sentence starts off with or includes some form of the phrase "Praise the Lord" and is very short. It's as if he can't wait to get to the next opportunity to say, "Praise the Lord."

The word, "praise" is derived from a Latin word which means to prize. When we praise, we are expressing our approval by valuing something or someone who has worth or merit. The word also means to "shine" or "make a show by raving and celebrating." To praise the Lord is to prize Him and rave about Him as the only one worthy of glory and honor.

Where to Praise

Verse 1 begins with a bang: "Praise the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens." The word used here for "Lord" is "Jehovah," which means, "the self-existent and eternal one." The psalmist then shifts his focus to another name and calls him, "God" or "El" in Hebrew, which means, "Strong and mighty."

We are to praise the eternal, strong and mighty God in "His sanctuary," which is a reference to the temple, where God used to dwell. Since Jesus died and rose again, God now "tabernacles" within His people, choosing not to dwell in a building. We are His temple and should therefore live out the implications of what that means. While God does not reside in this auditorium, He does reside within us.

The call to praise also extends to the "mighty heavens." The psalmist is calling the firmament, and everything above it, to break out into a celebration of praise. Verse 1 is really saying, "Praise God in heaven and on earth."

Why We Praise

We're called to rave about God for at least two reasons. First, we praise Him for what He does. We see this in the first part of verse 2: "Praise Him for His acts of power." This is the theme of many of the psalms. The phrase, "acts of power" carries with it the idea of God as a champion because of the victory He has won. His acts of power are displayed in creation and in our own lives as we enjoy the benefits of His grace, forgiveness, and salvation.

Some of you have great reason to praise the Lord for some recent ways in which He has demonstrated His acts of power in your life. You've seen Him restore a relationship, give you victory over a sin, renew your health, or answer a specific prayer request. You're praising Him today for what He's done in your life and you should.

But, we're also to praise Him for who He is in the second part of verse 2: "Praise Him for His surpassing greatness." When we praise God for who He is, we are recognizing his surpassing greatness.

This is a good reminder for us. When we praise Him, we should do it for what He's done in our lives and we should praise Him simply for who He is.

How We Praise

As we move to the next section in verses 3-5, we learn how to praise God. Some of us would be a bit unsettled if we worshipped the way the Israelites did. Psalm 150 describes an incredible praise band, just like we have here at MO! The instruments in the orchestra sounded out their praise to God. Large choirs and worship teams sang their anthems heralding God's greatness.

Let's take a look at how they praised: "Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise Him with the harp and lyre, praise Him with tambourine and dancing, praise Him with the strings and flute, praise Him with the clash of cymbals, praise Him with resounding cymbals."

The Israelites used 3 types of musical instruments wind, string, and percussion and all three are used in this pinnacle of praise in Psalm 150. This list of instruments appears to be in a random order and it's likely that each one was played when it was mentioned and continued to be heard through the last "Praise the Lord."

Who Is to Praise

Verse 6 pulls it all together, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord." Not merely the priests and Levites, nor just the congregation, but all living creatures are included in the choir of choirs. God has given each of us breath; we're called now to breathe His praise. This song begins and ends with the command to praise the Lord. We're to praise Him everywhere, with every means possible because of His mighty acts, and because of who He is. And, we're to praise Him with a wide variety of instrumentation and with triumphant expressions of worship. God desires for you and for me to live a lifestyle of spontaneous praise for the best instrument of praise is a man or woman, teenager, or child wholly committed to Him. We are to be a people of praise.

There is nothing more majestic or more beautiful in the entire book of Psalms than this brief finale. Let's shout out this phrase together, vigilant to not ever let it become just a cliché. Repeat it after me: "Praise the Lord!" Let's say it out loud three different times, emphasizing a different word each time.

Application - I can think of at least two applications from this psalm.

1. All of our faculties are to be engaged in praising God. The breath is used to blow the trumpet and flute; the fingers are used with the harp and strings; the whole hand hits the tambourine; the feet move in rhythm; and the arms are used to clash the cymbals together. Corporate worship is not meant to be passive as if it's something that we just watch or listen to. We are to be fully engaged in active worship, lifting our praise to God by engaging our head, our heart, and our hands.

2. The plurality and variety of instrumentation gives us freedom to worship God in different ways. There is not just one way to worship, or just one musical style that is acceptable to God. There is a diversity of musical preferences and interests here at Mount Olive and that is a good thing, not a bad thing. Our challenge is not to prove which style of music or worship is "right," but rather to grant grace to those who may choose to worship in different ways than we do. The key is to create corporate worship experiences that allow for both rejoicing and reverence.

Closing

If you're at all like me, when you think about how expressive and free worship was in the Old Testament, it makes you a little uncomfortable. We often think of Christianity as a reserved religion, and of Jesus as someone who was serious and proper at all times. I want to close by reading the words to a song written by Sydney Carter called, "The Lord of the Dance."

I danced in the morning when the world was begun, and I danced in the moon & the stars & the sun.

I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth, at Bethlehem I had my birth.

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee, but they would not dance and they did not follow me.

I danced for the fishermen, for James and John, they came with me and the dance went on.

Dance, dance, wherever you may be! I am the Lord of the dance said he—

And I'll lead you all wherever you may be, and I'll lead you all in the dance said He.

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame. The holy people said it was a shame.

They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high; they left me there on a cross to die.

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black. It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.

They buried my body and they thought I'd gone, but I am the dance and I still go on!

They cut me down, but I lept up high. I am the life that will never, never die.

I'll live in you if you live in me, I am the Lord of the dance said He.

Dance, dance, wherever you may be! I am the Lord of the dance said he—

And I'll lead you all wherever you may be, and I'll lead you all in the dance said He.

Together, let us praise the Lord! Amen!