

The Ultimate Praise

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon, church. How are we doing? Yep, Gilda. Yes, very nice to see all of you again. So, today, well, thank you, Pastor William, for leading us, going through so many, you know, praise and different kinds of psalms ideas.

And today, I would like to talk about the ultimate, the ultimate praise, which is in Psalm 150. Now, before we dig into today's passage, let me start with a story.

So, it was the Cold War period. So, it is 1977, the peak of Cold War. There is a young Jewish man named Nathan Sharansky.

He is a brilliant mathematician and a chess player as well. And he was living in the Soviet Union. And all he wanted to do is to emigrate to Israel.

And because of that, the KGB, the secret police of the Soviet Union arrested him. And he ends up spending, you wouldn't believe it, 13 years in Soviet prison camp.

[1 : 15] 13 years, every single day, morning to night, what sustains him? He reads all 150 psalms in Hebrew.

And in one of the letters, he wrote, What do these psalms give me? Gradually, my feeling of great loss and sorrow changes to one of bright hopes.

So, Sharansky treasures this book of psalms. And one time, the prison guard tried to take the psalms off him.

And he, so he rebelled. He threw himself onto the snow and just refused to move. And stays there until the prison guard gave him back the book of psalms.

So, this is Sharansky's wife. So, she travels around the world trying to fight for his husband's freedom.

[2 : 17] And even accepting an honorary degree on his behalf. So, at that moment, she says, In the lonely isolation of his prison cell, my husband had only his book of psalms for company.

And there, he discovered that the psalms King David wrote thousands of years ago could perfectly express the deepest feelings in his heart.

And eventually, Sharansky is released, emigrated to Israel. And he even steps into politics. And get this, in 2001, he became the debut prime minister of Israel.

Isn't it amazing? So, for, either for Jewish people or Christians around the world, the psalms are still the prayer book we go to.

Now, there are different kinds of psalms, right? As Pastor William shared, there are songs of praise, songs of laments, thanksgiving, and songs of trust.

[3 : 27] Altogether, there are 150 poems and songs of them. These are the heart cry of those believing in Yahweh as they worshipped and prayed.

Think of it almost like a spiritual concert with every kind of emotion. Joy, sorrow, confession, praise. Even people calling out to their enemies.

And most of them are written by King David. And there are some other writers too, right? Like Asaph or Moses. The book of Psalms are split into five books.

Very much like the book of Moses, the Torah. Symbolizing God's law and grace. Now, they are not just ancient songs for the Israelites.

They are also a treasure for our prayer today. So, whether you have a very happy mood or sad mood, there must be a psalm that matches your mood.

[4 : 28] And the most important thing is that they remind us that no matter how many storms hit us in our lives, God is always our refuge and strength.

Now, here is something worth noticing. I actually would like to invite you to open up your Bible app or the Bible in front of you, right? Let's go through Psalms 146 to 150.

They all share one thing in common, right? Let's spend a minute on them. Let's see if we can discover what they are. What is the common thing that is shared between Psalm 146 and 150? I'll give you a minute. Would you like a hint for me?

Yes? Okay. So, check out the very first line and the very last line of each psalm. What does it say? [5 : 33] Yes, Leo? Yes. Every psalm there begins and ends with the word, praise the Lord.

So, since there are five psalms altogether, you can see there are all ten of these sayings, right? So, it is a complete, perfect, it represents the absolute peak of praise when we reach the end of the book of Psalms.

Now, today we'll be focusing on Psalm 150 because it is like the grand finale of the New Year's fireworks, right? The most particular, dazzling display of praise.

So, here are our six verses altogether. Now, you may notice there are four things in it, okay? First, in verse 1, we talk about where to praise.

You see the word sanctuary, mighty heavens? Verse 2 gives us the reason why to praise. And verse 3 and 5, how to praise.

[6 : 52] What instruments do we use to praise? And finally, who should be praising? But first, let's get it clear.

Who are we exactly praising? The Lord, Yahweh, is the one true God of the Bible. He is the maker of heaven, earth, and everything in them.

And He is also the loving Father for us, right? His name, Yahweh, means, I am who I am. He exists externally, eternally, with no beginning and end.

Where does His name first show up? It's in Exodus 3, 14. When God appears to Moses, and the Lord isn't just all-powerful.

He's also a God who wants to draw us close, draws us near. And He shows His love through His Son, Jesus Christ. Because, He is the maker of heaven and earth, the source of our lives, and that's why He's worthy of our praise.

[8 : 05] Now let's zoom in to the first two lines of verse 1. Praise the Lord, praise God in His sanctuary. Now notice this, praise, it is a command, it is not a suggestion.

It's not like, oh, I'm not feeling very ready today, or, well, I don't like the songs, I don't know the songs, or like, you know, I'm not sitting in my usual seat.

I'm not happy, so I'm not going to sing. No. Now, for this, you've got to look at, you know, our elderly folks in PCBC, right, which attends the Cantonese service.

no matter how cold it is in the morning, how much they struggle with their aging body, they still show up, every week. It's not just faith in this play, but it is about their obedience in action.

That's something we can always look up to. But, if we decide to bail on worship, the moment, something slightly inconvenient, what kind of faith would that be?

[9 : 19] Now, of course, there are special situations, right, for example, if you are genuinely unwell, or if we have a genuine emergency, and God understands, and so do our brothers and sisters, and maybe you will worship online instead.

That's a little bit harder, you know, because you'll be listening through the screen, you may sing in front of the screen, and it may not always feel natural.

But it really comes down to how determined we are. Right? We can still praise Him through the screen. But, now, honestly, if we really know how God has rescued us, and how much He loves us, it's hard to imagine not responding to Him with our lives, with our action, without stepping into the church.

Right? So, I think, the most natural response that we can give Him, is to come back to God's house, and praise Him together. That's praise God in His sanctuary.

Now, the next line says, praise Him in His mighty heavens. What does that mean? Now, in the original Hebrew, the heavens, refers to a dome-shaped canopy, that stretched over the sky, like another sanctuary of God.

[10 : 45] The big sanctuary. So, this verse, actually talks about the two sanctuaries here. First, it's the one on earth, right? The temple in Jerusalem.

In our case, it's going to be our building, our church building, right? And the other one, is on, you know, in the heavenly realm, which is the nature, and the universe, all around us.

And together, they tell us, the Lord, rules over, not just earth, but the heaven as well. So, when we step outside, and, look up to the stars, to the clouds, to the sun, we see God's power, power in his

creation, and right there, anywhere, we can pour out our worship.

So, this is my invitation to all of us, two sanctuaries, one in-house, one outside, and they're both God's house. And, how do we praise and worship outside?

It's easy, eh? We can just pick up, a guitar, or any, handy instruments, or just sing a cappella, maybe, right? There's so many ways, to praise him. How did you praise, when you were in Vanuatu?

[12:02] Irene, dance, yeah? Even in Odor, right? Yeah. Now, we come to verse 2, which explains, why, we praise, the Lord.

Oh, yep, here is our, sanctuary, you see? Yeah, so this is, how the ancient, people view, heaven, and earth, and the underworld.

Verse 2, praise him for his acts of power, praise him for his surpassing greatness. Now, the acts of power, in the original language, it refers to God's mighty power, and authority, and it hints back to the book of Exodus.

What has he done in the book of Exodus? He judged Egypt with the ten plagues, he parted the Red Sea for the Israelites to walk through, and provided everything his people need in the wilderness, right?

We've been studying the book of Deuteronomy, right? That's what we see. Now, all that is God's power on full display, and we're not just praising what God did in the past, but we are praising the very nature of the power he revealed through his saving actions.

[13:34] Now, what about surpassing greatness? What did that mean? The original word points to not just the overwhelming power that God has, but also about richness, abundance, vastness, and honor.

So, when we praise, we can reflect on that richness, abundance, and greatness, and at the same time, we may even realize how insignificant we are.

Yet, we get to throw ourselves to him, into his boundless greatness, and this is our reason to praise him.

Can you think of any worship songs that talk about God's greatness? Anyone? Yes. So, for example, well, How Great Thou Art, or Great Are You, Lord?

I think those are, you know, some of the songs that we sang recently. These songs echo Psalm 150. So, next time, when we sing those songs, we pull our hearts out, and we know that we are connecting with Psalm 150.

[14:45] Now, verse 3, we talk about the how now, okay? So, verses 3 and 5, we see a bunch of musical instruments. So, these verses tell us what we can praise God with.

Now, three point, so, the first instrument there, is the sounding of the trumpet. The original word of trumpet is shova, which is a horn, made from a ram's horn.

So, it is a really important instrument in ancient Israel. It looks like this. They would blow it on big occasions, for example, the Jewish New Year, the Day of Atonement, or when they go to the battle, they would carry this instrument with them.

Let's see how it sounds, shall we? So, can we make sure we have the... Yes. Can you hear that? Maybe we will. Let's try that one more time.

Wait. Oh, it's gone. Yep, there you go. Now, in Exodus 19, when God, the Almighty God, appeared in Mount Sinai, the scripture says this, as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him.

[16:27] So, the trumpet gathered the people for the announcement of significant events. And, most importantly, it symbolizes God's power and his awe-inspiring, earth-shaking presence.

And, that's what the trumpet means here. Now, next up, we have another two instruments. Right? What are they? Praise him with the harp and lyre.

And, you may ask, what are these instruments? Right? We don't really use them these days. Are they even relevant to us? Now, the harp, Neville, is a large one, large one in size, right?

It's probably for big worship gatherings. And, lyre, Kinuo, is the smaller, more portable one. So, now, they, they look something like this.

Do you see? Yeah? The big one is the harp, the smaller one is lyres. Now, because we are a Chinese church, right? So, I look up the equivalents in ancient China.

[17:36] We have, we do similar instruments. You see the bigger one there? It's called, gu zhang, ha bai?

Kham. Okay? And, the smaller one is called ssap. Okay? So, gu ssap tan kham. All right? Like this. So, so I do think, you know, ancient, across ancient civilizations, around the world, people had something similar, to praise God.

I would like to, let us hear how it sounds. All right? So, this is, a, instrument expert, who tried to recreate, what an ancient, lyre sounds like.

Okay, here we go. Thank you.

Really interesting, eh? Yeah, so this is the ancient sound that you would hear, you know, when people sing praises. Now, what about our modern instruments?

[19 : 08] Now, remember we have two instruments, right? One big, one small. Do you see them right in front of you? Yeah? You do, right? So think of the big one like a piano or like a big pipe organ.

Not easy to look around, okay? So that can be the harp. And the small one, more like a guitar, that can be our lyre. So next time, when you see the word harp and lyre in the Bible, basically picture a worship band in front of you.

Piano, guitar. Now, let's move on to the next part. Praising with timbrel and dancing. Now, there was one famous scene in the book of Bible with Moses' big sister leading Israelite's woman in a dance, right?

And her name is Miriam. Miriam, the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her with timbrels and dancing.

And Psalm 149 says, Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp. You see, percussion, very important instruments.

[20 : 24] Do we see it here? Yes, we do. See? Now, you see, timbrel and dancing do show up quite often together.

I don't know how many of you have watched Korean traditional dance. Yeah? And also, another more than example would be marching bands. Right?

We see that much more in the United States. But you can see drumming can be mixed with, you know, marching and choreography. We still see this kind of music today.

But we rarely see this in our churches now. Well, in fact, some churches don't even allow drumming. Right? They reckon that's not their tradition. But we can see all of the Bible, timbrel and dancing, showing up as a kind of heartfelt, full-body praise.

And I think it is totally appropriate for us to dance and hit loud drums to praise God. Imagine if we could do that, you know, in PCBC in the future.

[21 : 38] That would be cool, eh? Yeah? Dancing. How many dancers are here? Dancers. Yes. Now, having said that, there are some caveats about worship.

We don't want to lose focus on who we are worshipping. We don't want to just get lost in rhythm or just chasing a good feeling about ourselves. We definitely shouldn't be worshipping music itself. And when we are leading up front, let's not forget about our mission. Our mission is to lead the congregation into God's presence.

And to give it all for the glory of God. Now, let's move on to the second part of verse 4. Another, wait, hang on.

Praise Him. Praise Him with the strings and pipe. Now, think of it like a symphony orchestra with all kinds of, you know, violins, cellos.

[22 : 43] Winds would be like clarinets, flutes, you know, French horn, orchestra, praising God. Now, verse 5.

Another two instruments here. Right? The clash of cymbals. Praise Him with resounding cymbals. Then you may ask, why are there two kinds of cymbals?

Some scholars suggest that the clash of cymbals acts as a cue for those leading worship that, okay, something is about to happen.

Now, and the resounding cymbals, possibly the bigger one, tells the congregation that it is time to praise together. They serve different functions.

But of course, I mean, those meanings got a little bit lost today. Now, I want us to pay attention. Do you notice how many instruments the psalmist mentioned so far have a count?

[23 : 54] How many? Anyone? Psalm 150. Yep. So, we've got what?

Let's count together, right? The trumpet. And then we have what? The harp and the lyre. Timbrel. Strings.

And pipe. And finally, cymbals. Seven. Seven is the number of completeness. Do you see that? Our psalmist is hiding a secret code here to tell us that seven is the complete praise.

Seven different kinds of instruments. Isn't that amazing? Now, so, to have so many instruments praising together, it cannot be noisy and chaotic.

The sound should be pleasing and beautiful so that music can truly glorify God. And we can assume it takes a lot of rehearsals and a lot of behind-the-scenes work, right?

[25 : 00] Right? And finally, we come to verse 6. Who should be praising God? Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Look, it's beyond human. It's not just about God's people. It's about all humanity, even every creature living in the entire universe.

And Revelation 5 gives us this stunning picture. Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth, under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be praise and glory and honor and power.

And forever and ever. Now, imagine this. Every animal, every fish, every bird, and suddenly God would give them a voice.

To the Lamb be praise and glory and honor and power. Now, who is the Lamb here? Of course, it refers to Jesus Christ. And the New Testament tells us that he is the embodiment of God himself.

[26 : 15] And you may say, hey, come on, I don't think animals can talk, right? But anyone who had a pet, you know how pets can communicate with you, right?

With a little bit of whining, making sound, and so on. So let me tell you a story. So back in the Middle Ages, there was this saint here called St. Francis of Assisi.

And honestly, this guy is something else. He doesn't just love teaching people. He wants to even share the gospel with the birds. And one time he was walking through a valley in Italy and sees a huge flock of birds, right?

Doves, crows, and even magpies. And the moment St. Francis sees them, he was so stoked. He practically jumps for joy and he goes over to say hello, right?

You know what the birds do when you approach them? They go away, right? You know what? They didn't. The birds didn't fly off.

[27 : 21] It's like they were waiting for him. So St. Francis says, My brother and sister birds, you really ought to praise God. He's given you beautiful feathers and wings that you can soar into the sky.

You don't sow, you don't reap, but God looks after you every single day. How blessed you are. And the amazing part, the birds seem to actually understand what he's saying.

So the birds stretch out their necks, spread their wings, and open their beaks wide, and gaze up at St. Francis. And he gently strokes them, blesses them, give them a blessing.

Okay, now you may fly off. And there they went. Yes, maybe even little animals long to know about God and praise him.

And just imagine one day, every living creature will be doing that, praising Jesus together. So how do we praise Jesus?

[28 : 28] You might say, I can't play any musical instruments. But don't forget, God already placed the most beautiful instrument in you, which is your voice, your human voice.

And if even the animals and birds will one day use their voice to praise him, what excuse have we got for keeping our mouth shut when we come to worship? Now, the bottom line is this.

God delights in our heartfelt praise. So, let's do it every single time we come, shall we? Now, so what does worship look like nowadays?

Your typical church would probably have a worship band, a piano, and a guitar, right, a bass, drum sets with, what? Cymbals. And sometimes we even add a violin, and a flute, and a trumpet, and with all, you know, heaps of people singing together.

That's already a picture of Psalms 150, right there. Every week, we come here to do Psalm 150. Now, when we worship the way Psalm 150 describes, you know what will happen?

[29 : 51] Look at 2 Chronicles 5. Verse 13 there says, The singers raised their voices in praise to the Lord and sang, He is good.

His love endures forever. Then the temple of the Lord was filled with the cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God.

Look, there is a special presence, and grace coming straight from God, when we worship Him in, as one group, as one family.

This is something you cannot replicate, when you do your private devotion, or sing to Him alone. It has to come through the whole community, worshiping Him on a grand scale.

And right there, God reveals His holy presence to His people. So, Psalm 150 tells us that our praise was never meant to be a personal affair.

[30 : 59] It takes even the whole universe to praise Him because He deserves it. So, let's wrap up our key points here. First, where to praise?

So, let's faithfully come back to church to worship our God week after week, and stop letting silly excuses get in the way. We are meant to worship as a group in God's house.

And remember, there's a bigger house for God outside the nature. We can also worship there under open skies too.

And second, why do we praise? It's because of God's boundless greatness and also for His saving works He's done in our lives. Maybe you have received healing in the past.

Maybe God has turned your life around. Maybe you used to have a lot of, you know, sharp edges in your personality. And now, because you know Christ, you've been transformed. You become more gentle and full of grace.

[32 : 03] Those are evidence of life being turned around. Those are evidence of God's saving power and also our reason to praise Him. And number three, how do we praise?

What instruments do we praise Him with? Let's start with the basic. Our human voice. We can always do a cappella. But if God somehow stirs your heart to learn musical instruments, some are pretty easy to pick up as well, right?

The drums, you probably need a couple of weeks to get started, to get a beat going. And if you love singing, you can do it at your own seats and you don't have to sing perfectly, brilliantly from day one.

You just keep practicing, you learn as you go. And if you already sing very well and you've known the Lord for a while and you've been baptized, why not come and lead up front and join the worship team?

Number four, who should be praising? Since everything that has breath should be praising the Lord, how about this?

[33 : 17] Can we invite a friend maybe to come into the house because God would love to see them praising him as well. And maybe their life will be transformed when they come to church praising him.

So, let's give it a go. And God would surely love to see us stepping out of a comfort zone and to invite people to come. shall we pray together?

Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, you are worthy of all praise. Not just a kind of simple praise.

You deserve the most complete, the most magnificent, the most wonderful praise. Whatever time it is in the year, Lord, help us remember the power of your creation and the works you have done in our lives because these are exactly what fuel our praise.

And Lord, we admit that we do often fall short. Have mercy on us. Transform our hearts so we can throw ourselves into worship more and more wholeheartedly.

[34 : 36] And Lord, may you grow our singing skills, our musical skills, not for our own glory, but so that we can offer the most complete praise to you. And Lord, strengthen the brothers and sisters serving in worship ministry.

Let them experience your gracious care and pour out your power on them week after week. And may every breath be a praise to you all day long, every day.

We pray in the name of Christ Jesus. Amen.