

PRAISE TO THE LORD, VERY GREAT (Psa 104) CBC-Exeter, 10 Jan 2021

The psalms (songs of praise to the LORD) exist, fundamentally, for praising the LORD. This is important to the righteous, despised by the unrighteous. “With so much going on in the world, will you preach to us about praising the LORD? How can we praise the LORD now?” I say maybe there is no better time than now to emphasize the perpetual priority of praising the Lord! Whether we are peaceful and prosperous or needy and distressed, in times of abundance or in times of trouble, we ought to PTL!

A simple exposition (35 vv.) will occupy our brief time (read aloud).

Let the Lord, who is very great, be praised!

The psalm is in sections addressing different parties: the psalmist himself (1a, 33-35), the LORD (1c-9, 20-30), and others hearing the psalm (10-19, 31-32). These alternate → self, the LORD, others, the LORD, others, self. Each section enumerates ways the LORD is very great and praiseworthy.

A. Self-exhortation (1ab). I will praise the Lord, *very great!* “Bless” =praise. “O my soul” emotionally intense resolve. “O LORD my God” reverential, covenantal. “Very great” (lit. trans.). So great it can’t be fully expressed or comprehended because it is absolute and infinite (Psa 145.3).

It is a greatness, not of quantity, but quality. [His] greatness . . . hath no end: it is a vanity to imagine any limits can be affixed to it, or that any creature can say, “Hitherto it can go, and no further.” It is above all conception, all inquisition of any created understanding. No creature ever had, nor ever can have, that strength of wit and understanding, to conceive the extent of his [greatness]” (Charnock, EAG 2.19).

What is the greatest thing besides the Lord? It is less than nothing compared to Him! (Isa 40.15, 17). So, to infinite Greatness belongs eternal praises from all creatures. The psalmist strikes up that eternal ministry.

B. Addressing the Lord (1c-9). Lord, You are very great! First declares, then describes God’s greatness—in terms of creation. Why? Because that is the only way we creatures can know and understand. Only God knows Himself as He is in Himself. Our knowledge of Him is necessarily by His free revelation of Himself (1 Cor 2.10, 11; Isa 45.15). Revelation, while true, is necessarily inferior, limited, and creaturely (cf. Exod 33.20-23).

God’s very great condescension of divine revelation in creaturely terms is misunderstood and abused by many in heretical ways. 1) By hanging on to creaturely conceptions of God, “univocism.” Scripture describes God as if He had “body, parts, and passions,” but the orthodox recognize figurative language in these and deny they are proper to God (2LCF 2.1). Even when God is called “great,” it is a poor analogy to the greatness that is God. 2) By identifying God with creation (all is One [nature/God], “pantheism”). The founder and President of the World Pantheist Movement wrote, “In essence, pantheism holds that there is no divinity other than the universe

and nature. Pantheism is a religious belief that reveres and cares for nature, a religion that joyously accepts this life as our only life, and this earth as our only paradise, if we look after it” (Paul Harrison). This is nothing but pagan idolatry condemned in Rom 1.25. In Psa 104, Creator/creation distinct. Creation serves *to glorify God*. The fullest revelation of God to us is Jesus Christ (Jn 1.18), God Incarnate (in the flesh), the greatest divine condescension to reveal God to us in/through creation. Psa 104 mentions many elements of creation to illustrate God’s greatness.

* In Yourself (1c-2a). Royal robe metaphor (cannot see God but only a manifestation of Him: honor/majesty, light → the King of glory!

* Over the heavens (2b-3). Atmospheric terms convey exaltation. Royal temple imagery with curtains, beams, stretching from sea to heaven. God alone portrayed as the “cloud-rider.”

* Over the angels (4). Great yet only His court servants obeying Him.

* Over earth and seas (5-9). Deepest most solid foundations, clothed with mighty oceans, subject to God’s total control (up, down, boundaries).

C. Addressing others (10-19). He is very great, so let all praise Him. From “Thou” to “He.” Psalmist addressing either himself or others about God. Either way, it is for the purpose of holy meditation issuing in worship.

* Over flowing waters (10-13). Springs, rivers, streams: supplying.

* Over food and drink for man and beasts (14-15). Vegetation for life of men and animals. Wine from grapes, oil from olives, bread from grains.

* Over the habitations of wild animals (16-18). Thriving cedars, nesting birds, high-climbing goats: All exist, live, flourish by His greatness.

* Over the sun, moon (19). They exist, move, by His wisdom, power.

B’. Addressing the Lord (20-30). Lord, You are very great

* Over night and day (20-23). Night creatures to/from dens; man to/from work, all constantly orchestrated by God.

* Interjection: Your wisdom appears in the variety and richness (24)! Cumulative contemplation triggers holy outburst! All is His, exalts God!

* Over the sea (25-26). A dwelling teeming with life, ships, leviathan.

* Over life and death (27-30). Even the greatest creatures eat out of God’s hand, totally subject to His good pleasure whether they live or die.

C’. Addressing others (31-32). He is very great, so let all praise Him

* His glory and delight in His works shall last forever (31) or a prayer that this state of things will last forever. The psalmist pleased it is so.

* All His creatures exist for His glory (32). Look/tremble and touch/smoke is evidence of a kind of reverence even in inanimate objects!

A’. Self-exhortation (33-35). Statements of holy resolve, commitment.

* I will sing to Him (33) to dying breath, my *raison d’être!* (WSC #1).

* I will meditate on Him (34), my highest spiritual pleasure, joy.

Words of a soul ravished and enraptured by the extended contemplation.

* I will pray for the full display of His glory (35ab). Creation glorious now but greater glory when sinners who won’t praise God are finally judged!

* I will praise the Lord, very great (35cd). Circling back to verse 1. ♪