

Praise Psalms

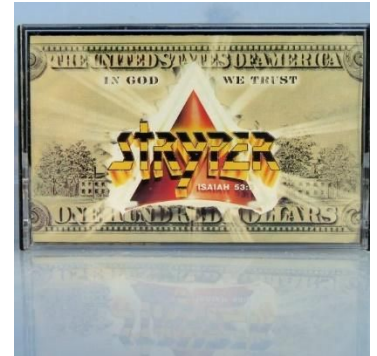
Psalm 150

September 1, 2019

Please read Psalm 150 before going further in this transcript.

Some of my favorite music to listen to back in high school was from the Christian metal band, Stryper. Their name is based on Isaiah 53:5, "...by His stripes we are healed" (NKJV). They weren't quite HEAVY metal but they were pretty controversial back in the 1980's, because they were men with really long, beautiful hair. They also threw Bibles into the crowds at their concerts. Perhaps the greatest controversy though, was because of the particular instruments that they used. Specifically, the raging electric guitar and loud drums, with loud clashing cymbals!

One of my favorite albums of theirs was titled, "In God We Trust."¹ Stryper took heat for this as well, because they put the picture of a \$100 bill on the album cover. Some Christians criticized them for bragging about how much money they were making. Now, this wasn't their intent, of course. Their desire was to call America to rethink this important logo that was stamped on our money. Calling us back to be a nation whose trust, is indeed, still in God. Well, their controversial look and their radical approach, caused quite a schism among Christians. I was naively unaware of most of this controversy at the time. I just knew that I loved their music. So, I bought their cassette tapes and played them, over and over again, until I wore them out.



For me, these songs by Stryper, were in line with the sentiment of Ephesians 5:18-19, "...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." For me, they were genuine "songs from the Spirit." They enabled me to "sing and make music from my heart to the Lord." I can still vividly remember cruising along in my old high school car², singing those songs at the top of my lungs. For me, it was VERY MUCH, a time of praise/worship. It probably sounds pretty odd to some people, perhaps even unbelievable that you could worship God through heavy metal music. But I can tell you, in all sincerity, I was genuinely communing with God through those songs. You may understand a little more why that was the case, if you read some of their lyrics: "It's been said money talks. If so what does it say? Four simple words we see every day. The rich, the poor; Heaven is for those who choose. Don't put your trust in money; You'll lose (again and again). In God we trust; In Him we must believe (He is the only way). In God we trust, His Son we must receive (tomorrow's too late, accept Him today)."³

Pretty good lyrics, right? Unfortunately, the distraction of their screaming high voices and their outrageous outfits, kept many people from ever hearing those words. But, not me. And, not many of my Christian peers, who were trying to LIVE out our faith, without SELLING out on our particular musical preference.⁴ Here's the thing about all the various musical styles in our world: God accepts our worship through all of them. From every different culture, from each new generation, the creativity and diversity of music that people enjoy, is welcomed by God. Every musical style has the potential to bring God glory. Certainly not ALL music glorifies God, but that's NOT due to the particular instruments used or the style of the music itself. Music is neutral, just like many things, it can be used for good or for evil. There is no indication in Scripture that God prefers a particular style of music. As we dig into Psalm 150 that becomes clear.

¹ Released in 1988, the summer after I graduated high school. Isaiah 53:5 was printed right on the front of the album cover, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And **by His stripes** we are healed." (NKJV)

² It was either a green Dodge Dart or a blue Ford Fairmont if I remember correctly.

³ Writers: CHRISTOPHER WALTON, SEAN MCELHONE, SIMON SCOTT, GLENN SCULLION, MICHAEL ROBERTS, GARY WILSON.

⁴ I've since continued to enjoy Stryper's music. Stryper has produced multiple albums as early as 1984, "The Yellow and Black Attack," and as recently as 2018, "God Damn Evil." As you can tell by their most recent album title, they continue to push the edge of "acceptable" Christian parameters.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stryper_discography

Psalm 150 lays out the where, why, how, and who of praising the LORD. First, it lays out the WHERE.

1) WHERE should we praise the LORD? Psalm 150:1 begins, “Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens.” This sermon was preached in a sanctuary. This very room has been built for this exact reason, so that we have a place where we can praise the LORD. But obviously, God’s sanctuary isn’t limited to any one room in a local church. God’s glory is much bigger than what could be contained in this tiny space. (So, those of you reading this message at home, can worship the LORD right where you are.) That’s why Psalm 150 goes on to mention “his mighty heavens.” A good way to picture this, is as though the skies above us were the ceiling of a mighty cathedral.⁵ In other words, this whole planet can be considered a sanctuary for God’s glory. In fact, even beyond this planet. God’s glory is SO great that it fills the ENTIRE universe. That’s why the praise that we bring Him, must do no less.⁶ The simple answer to the question, “WHERE should we praise the LORD?,” is EVERYWHERE. All throughout His vast creation.

The next thing Psalm 150 lays out, is the WHY.

2) WHY should we praise the LORD? Frankly, this is probably a silly question. There are SO MANY reasons WHY we should praise the LORD. Psalm 150:2 summarizes it nicely though, “Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness.” “His acts of power” range from creating the universe and the miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea, all the way to raising Jesus from the dead and transforming the lives of each individual Christ-follower. “His surpassing greatness” speaks of His incredible character and attributes. Our God has a perfect blend of grace and truth, love and holiness, forgiveness and judgment. The simple answer to the question, “WHY should we praise the LORD?,” is for what He does and for who He is.

Psalm 150 then moves on to the HOW.

3) HOW should we praise the LORD? We are given a longer answer here, lots more detail, in fact. So, here we need to dig in a little more. Let’s begin by running through some of the instruments that are listed in verses 3-5. We should note, this is NOT necessarily meant to be a comprehensive list. This is just a good sampling of what was popular for the Hebrew people in this particular time in history.⁷

The Trumpet was made from a ram’s horn. It was an instrument that was associated with authority. It would have been used for things like the coronation of a king or a battle cry. But, it was also used in worship. The Harp was a large stringed instrument made of wood. The strings were plucked with one’s fingers. The Lyre was similar to a harp, but a smaller, stringed instrument made of wood. It was easier to carry around so it was more common than the harp. The lyre was played more like a guitar. The Timbrel is better known as a tambourine.⁸ It’s played with one hand and often “associated with dancing.”⁹ The Dancing would have likely been “performed by a group in a circle;” it was “associated with revelry and joy.”¹⁰ So as much as we want our worship to be reverent, the indication here is that worship should also be joyful and celebratory. The Strings are a general reference to all kinds of stringed instruments. The Pipe was a wind instrument, like a flute. Although, once again, this may be a general reference to all kinds of different wind instruments. The Cymbals

⁵ “His mighty heavens” are literally “the vault of his power... i.e. the vault... in which his power resides. Usually thought to refer to God’s heavenly temple... it may signify the vaulted ceiling of the visible universe viewed as a cosmic temple.” *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1023.

⁶ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 528.

⁷ This information relies heavily on two main sources: *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1187 AND Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.: Psalms*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008, pp. 1010-1011.

⁸ I can still remember, as a child, how many of the people in our church brought their tambourines with them. Their Bible was in one hand, their tambourine in the other.

⁹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1187.

¹⁰ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1187.

were made of copper or bronze. They were either smashed together to produce a sound or they were struck by a stick or something.¹¹ This would be similar to the cymbals on our church drum set.

One thing to note though, is how many instruments are NOT mentioned here, or anywhere in the Psalms for that matter. There is no organ, no piano, no electric guitar, and no drum set. And yet, even though there are many instruments that are NOT specifically listed, there's NO indication that there's any type of "exclusive" list, anywhere in the Bible.

I like the way the writer, Ben Patterson, puts it: God "likes music, including percussion, apparently loud percussion, as in 'loud clanging cymbals.' Oh yes, God likes dance, too."¹² Patterson goes on to challenge local churches to embrace and to put into practice the variety of ways that God likes to be praised." He urges us to confess any of our cultural prejudice and to admit that we sometimes set unnecessary, even immature limitations that keep our church from "the biblical fullness of adoration." That last phrase really caught my attention, "the biblical fullness of adoration." Bros/Sis in Christ, at our church, let's not set limits, that would keep us from "the biblical fullness of adoration" of our great God! The fact is, God can be glorified in a myriad of ways. Not just through a myriad of instruments, but also through a myriad of instrumentations. Through a variety of musical styles. Whether through classic hymns with traditional instruments or modern praise songs with contemporary instruments. We can praise the LORD through classical music with a full-scale symphony orchestra or through the styles of classic rock, jazz, country, hip hop, and so on. Believe it or not, we could even worship God through Ska music or Polka, if we wanted to. There's really no reason to limit the style of music that people can offer up in worship to God. As long as it "praises Him for His acts of power" and "praises Him for His surpassing greatness." As long as it points to His truth, Christ-followers should freely embrace their own particular heart language and musicality.

Personally, I've come to a firm conviction regarding the various musical styles and how I worship God: **Every musical style has a place, in bringing God the glory that He is due.** Musical style can be equated with our heart language. Much like we talk about the 5 love languages: Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Giving/Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, and Physical Touch. Many of us have come to understand that each person gives/receives love in a particular way. It's not a right or wrong thing; it's just how we are personally wired. The various styles of worship music can be like those 5 Love Languages. There tends to be one particular style that helps each of us most readily connect with God. In other words, certain music helps us to express worship in our own heart language.

God is the one who created us to be creative people.¹³ And, He is the one who inspires us to praise Him through all of our various cultures and languages. He welcomes every musical style and every musical instrument, as long as it is used for His glory. Therefore, let's not waste our time in useless "Worship Wars" or in declaring why our particular musical style is superior to someone else's. Our energy is better spent showing mutual respect for one another's musical preferences.¹⁴

I've also come to another firm conviction; this one more recently. And, it's one I urge each person to consider carefully: Even when the music being offered is NOT in our preferred musical style, let's love God enough and be spiritually mature enough, to worship Him anyways. To give God the praise that is due His Name. After all, it's not about our preferences, it's about God's glory.

The simple answer to the question, "HOW should we praise the LORD?," is with EVERYTHING we have."¹⁵ And, let's not hesitate to praise God "with great intensity!"¹⁶ In Psalm 150, "every kind of instrument, solemn or [joyous], percussive or melodic, [quiet or loud], is rallied [to praise the LORD]."

¹⁷ So let's praise the LORD with stringed instruments, with winds and percussion, with dancing, and

¹¹ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 1187.

¹² Ben Patterson, *God's Prayer Book*, Tyndale, Carol Stream, IL, 2008, p. 300.

¹³ Check out the sermon titled, "Declaring Our Creator's Glory," from August 18, 2019 at <http://www.efcbemidji.org/media>

¹⁴ Consider Romans 14:4, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall..."

¹⁵ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 528.

¹⁶ Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Rev. Ed.: Psalms*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2008, p. 1009.

¹⁷ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 2008, p. 529.

with our voices. With the whole orchestra plus dancers and singers! The best that any Show Choir has to offer!

As we come to the end of Psalm 150, we also come to the end of our summer sermon series. But, if you are interested in spending some more time in the Psalms on your own, we've included a list of resources. Some are more devotional in nature and some are for further academic study. They are listed in the footnotes below.¹⁸

At the beginning of summer, we began this series, by explaining that the book of Psalms is a book of worship songs. It was the hymnal that Jesus used. BUT, it is also a book of prayers and a book of teachings. So what is the final goal of this collection of 150 psalms? To what end are they driving at? What is the purpose of all these prayers and teachings? The ultimate end is revealed in the closing phrase, "Praise the LORD." In Hebrew, it's actually the word, "Hallelujah." Psalm 150 begins/ends with this word "Hallelujah," translated into English by the phrase "Praise the LORD." In fact, Psalm 150 is part of a group of psalms, from 146-150, all of which begin and end with that word "Hallelujah,"¹⁹ (with this phrase "Praise the LORD"). All of these many "Hallelujahs" serve as a kind of crescendo to the entire Book of Psalms.²⁰

This leaves us with just one question left to answer:

4) WHO should praise the LORD? The answer is about as all-inclusive as we could imagine in Psalm 150:6, "Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD."²¹ What could be a more fitting way to end the book of Psalms than a call to praise the LORD.²² Psalm 150 "is the most purely praise-oriented psalm in the [entire Book of Psalms]... all that is left is simply to praise God."²³ In other words, all 6 verses, only instructs us to do ONE thing: Praise the LORD!

Therefore, in response to Psalm 150's call to praise, spend some time worshipping the LORD this week and bringing Him the glory that He is due!

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on September 1, 2019 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*

¹⁸ Check out these great resources! For Devotional Time: *The Songs of Jesus* by Timothy/Kathy Keller or *God's Prayer Book* by Ben Patterson. For Deeper Study: *Psalms 1-72/73-150*, 2 vol. set by Derek Kidner or *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Rev. ed.: *Psalms* by Willem A. VanGemeren.

¹⁹ See also the beginning and end of Psalms 113, 117, 135. The actual word "hallelujah" is only used 4 times in the New Testament, all 4 of them occur in the same chapter, Revelation 19:1-6. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 2173.

²⁰ הללויה Now, this Hebrew word "Hallelujah" is a combination of "Hallelu" and "Yah." "**Hallelu**" simply means "**praise**." "Praise" is about expressing our admiration for God and recommending Him to others. To put it another way, praise is a combination of both DECLARING that the LORD (Yahweh) is good and INVITING others to "taste and see" that He is good (Psalm 34:8). "**Yah**" is an abbreviation for "**Yahweh**." In other words, "praise Yah" is short for "praise Yahweh." So, whenever you see that word "Hallelujah," Don't let the "J" throw you off. **It's a little confusing because, grammatically, the "Y" switches to "J."** But the "jah" at the end of Hallelujah is referring to the "Yah" at the beginning of Yahweh, the one true God. (Learn more in the notes in *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. xviii and 13 (footnote on Genesis 2:4). Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011.)

²¹ Consider Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; and Philipians 2:10-11

²² As opposed to other places in Scripture, this is NOT a call to the rocks/trees (Luke 19:39-40/Isaiah 55 :12) or to the sun/moon (Psalm 148:3) to praise the LORD. This is a call to all of mankind; consider Genesis 2:7.

²³ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1187.