

# BELPRES CHURCH

## Sermon Title: Praise the LORD!

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### Scripture: Psalm 150

<sup>1</sup> Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;  
praise him in his mighty heavens.

<sup>2</sup> Praise him for his acts of power;  
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

<sup>3</sup> Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,  
praise him with the harp and lyre,

<sup>4</sup> praise him with timbrel and dancing,  
praise him with the strings and pipe,

<sup>5</sup> praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.

<sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.

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### Transcript:

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My name is Rich Leatherberry, I'm the missions pastor here at the church. Happy New Year. Thanks for joining us in worship today. It is great to have you with us. We get to read the scripture today. It's Psalm 150. "Praise the Lord, praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his powerful acts. Praise him because he is greater than anything else. Praise him by blowing trumpets. Praise him with harps and lyres. Praise him with tambourines and dancing. Praise him with stringed instruments and flutes. Praise him with clashing cymbals, praise him with clanging cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord, praise the Lord."

So Jesus, would you take these words that we've just read in scripture, and Holy spirit would you turn them into your words for us? Would you take the places where we are right now, listening to you, kitchens and living rooms and bedrooms and maybe outside or in cars, would you transform those places into places of worship? Make us different people and we'll give you the praise, in Jesus name. Amen.

Well, a year after my wife and I were married, we went on a hike in the mountains by Lake Tahoe. My wife had grown up in the area, especially during the summers. And she'd often gone to this lake where they would hike and go swimming. So she wanted to take me there. Well, the half-hour hike that she remembered from her childhood turned into this three hour hike up the mountain. And surprisingly, or maybe not surprisingly, but sadly the lake of her childhood turned out to be kind of the stinky algae covered mud pond.

And nobody wanted to go swimming in that. Certainly not even the dogs. So it was good for a good laugh though. And we turned around and headed back down the mountain. Well it was getting kind of late in the afternoon, the sun was getting low in the sky. We began to get a little bit nervous about getting back to the car before it got dark. We hadn't come prepared and we'd heard lots of stories about people who'd gone on these day hikes and then gotten lost somewhere in the forest. And we didn't want to be one of those stories. So we started walking fast. Somewhere along the way we started singing these praise songs that we remembered from college. And first we kind of started singing quietly and then it got louder and louder.

We felt bolder. We felt more joy. We felt the presence of God as we were hiking. Well, then we came to the first fork in the trail and we didn't know which to go. So in our enthusiasm to get up to the lake, we'd completely forgotten to think about and to look for how we got back down to the car.

Now, the sun was setting. No one else was around. It was dark. We didn't know which way to go. And even though all of that was true, we felt this surprising peace about it all. Now the short story is that while we stopped the dogs kept going. They picked one of the forks and they just kept walking. So we followed them. And after a while, we realized that we recognized some of the things that we'd seen on the way up and the dogs were going the right direction.

Well, the same thing happened at the next fork in the trail. The dogs knew which way to go. So we just followed the dogs down the mountain, singing, just praising, worshiping God as we went until we finally got to the car. Now I realize that it can sound like the moral of this story is that you don't need to bring emergency prepared equipment. When you go on hikes, just depend on God and the dogs. Not what I'm saying. Not at all. That was so dumb. But what I am saying is that God turned that experience into something sacred. Through it all our heart and our mind was set on him. And that helped us experience an intimate nearness with God.

God turned our whole journey down the mountain into a sanctuary of praise. God took away our worry, our fear, our anxiety, and he replaced it with his joy, his peace and his courage. No matter what you are going through today, no matter how long you've been going through it, God can do the same for you. That is the power of praise.

Now, Psalm 150 is the final song in the book of Psalms. The Psalms are Israel's ancient hymn book. They're filled with the lyrics of the songs they used to sing while working out in the fields are sitting around the kitchen table or even more importantly in worship. And the word praise occurs 13 times in this Psalm. It is the centerpiece word and is used to develop kind of a

rhythmic joyous almost raucous crescendo that calls us into this invitation to praise the Lord. Now praise is different than worship. Worship is what we do for what we love. And when it comes to God, worship is our highest priority.

But praise, praise is actually an aspect of worship, it's an element of worship and Psalm 150 is specifically about praise. Praise is where we express our love and our devotion for God. We can praise God in worship, we can praise God in prayer. Praise is where we celebrate God's magnificent character and his nature. In the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 150, the Psalmist says, "Praise him for his powerful acts. Praise him because he is greater than anything else, praise the Lord." Now the word for praise in this song is hallelujah. And every time I hear this word, I think of my dear friend, Pastor Alexis. Every time he says that word, it's not a quiet hallelujah from Alexis. He shouts it. "Hallelujah."

And I asked him what hallelujah meant to him. He said, "It means more than praise. It means that with God we have the victory." He said, "When I say hallelujah, it is confirmation of the Lord's victory in either what is preached or what is prayed or what is sung. Hallelujah." Now I love that.

Hallelujah is our yes to the victory of God. Yes, to the power of God. Yes, to the goodness and unfailing love of God. We are agreeing with it. We are aligning our lives with it. We're saying, yes, this is for me. Can I get a hallelujah? Now, get this praise is one of the most honest things you and I can do. And that is because praise does not deny the severity of the circumstances that we are going through. That illness, that death of a loved one, that last job or opportunity, another year of having to study online rather than being able to live on campus or be with friends. Praise does not deny any of that. That stuff is real and it hurts.

But praise is confirming God is more than you're facing. God is bigger than that situation. God is more powerful than the power those things have over you. In him you have the victory. So you are saying, "I confirm it. I agree with it." Praise is our defiant shout of hallelujah in the midst of the real life stuff of our lives. Praise lifts our eyes from our circumstances to the one who is above all, sovereign overall, created it all, good over all. He is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, redeemer, forgiver, deliverer and friend. And that is the language of praise.

So there's three things that I want to talk about today as I talk about praise, and first is this. Praise creates an atmosphere of intimacy with God. Praise is a relationship. It's not an activity. It's not something that we do. Praise is the natural expression of our relationship with God. Praise comes from our experience with God and it's out of those experiences with God that we come to know him more.

We think often the praise is something we do like the songs that we sing before the sermon, or it's the phrase that we say when somebody gives us some good news. You know like, "Well, praise God for that." Or maybe praise is we're thinking of it as something that we do for other people in a way that shows our great love for God. But praise, praise is the time or the space that we create, where we can express our love and devotion for God. Praise creates an atmosphere of intimacy with a one we love.

Praise is the intersection between the finite, with the infinite. And it's in that space that we praise. It's the words that we think or say or sing. It's David dancing in front of the ark as it's being brought back into Israel. Oh, the overwhelming, never ending love of God. It chases me down, fights till I'm found, leaves the 99. I couldn't earn it. I don't deserve it. Still you give yourself away. That is the language of praise.

God desires an intimate relationship with each one of us. He wants to be known, not just intellectually but known like close up. His character revealed, his nature revealed to us, the depths of who God is. And since praise is the intersection between the finite and the infinite, the more we praise God, the more we experience him. And the more we experience God, the more we know him. And the more we know God, and the more we want to praise him. Praise is a relationship.

Second praise brings us to surrender. Now praise changes what we're focused on because it changes who we are focused on. Some of the challenges we face are short, like being lost for a few hours in the mountains. But other challenges we face are longer term. They go on and on and on. And the more we focus on our problems, the bigger they get and the worse we feel. Even small problems can become big problems because we continually focus on them. And that gives them more and more power and control over our lives.

Now the father of a good friend of mine was diagnosed with terminal cancer. And he was afraid, he was in pain, he was withdrawn and just withdrawing even further from the family. He was not a follower of Jesus. So the family asked me to reach out to him. So I did, and I actually ended up meeting with him a couple of times each week until he died. And we would talk about just all kinds of things. We talked about life and death. We talked about faith. We talked about God and the Bible. And then I'd read scripture and we'd talk about those things as well.

He let me pray for him. And there was even a point where he began to pray with me. Well, a couple of weeks before he died, he committed his life to Jesus Christ as Lord and savior. And in his final days, he knew that God loved him. He knew that he was about to inherit the promise of eternal life. But more significantly, he experienced God's presence in him. That gave him a deep, deep peace, even when facing death. And even though in those last days, he was often unable to communicate or say anything audibly. When he did the words that he spoke were these. "I love the Lord. I love the Lord. I love the Lord."

Praise, puts our whole life. Every situation into the hands of a really, really big God who loves us. And when we make him our focus, our problems shrink down and get smaller because the power and the magnanimity of our God is bigger. God is greater. God is stronger. God is exceedingly abundantly, able to do more than we can even ask or imagine.

Praise puts God in his rightful place as Lord. And that helps us put our circumstances and our problems in their rightful place, which is in his hands. God, I surrender, this life is yours. These circumstances are yours. This problem is yours. My heart, my mind, my body are yours. I give it all to you. I am done here. I am letting go. I relinquish it all to your care. I surrender. And the beauty of surrendering is that you cannot surrender control and maintain control over your

circumstances at the same time. Something's got to give. And so God says, "Give it all to me, give it all to me."

Praise is a relationship, praise brings us to surrender. And third praise changes us. It makes us different people. You see praise isn't for God, God doesn't need our praise. We need our praise. Praise is for us. It changes us. It changes our heart. It changes our mind. It changes our attitude. It changes the way that we approach the relationships that we are in. You can't change the circumstances that you're in, but you can change what you're looking at. And you can change the one you are looking at.

Now, there's lots of times when we don't feel like praising. If we're just to be honest, we just don't feel like it. Maybe your circumstances are just too difficult or maybe you feel like there's just nothing good going on in your life. Now, feelings as true and as real as they are, can also hold us back from what God wants to do in our lives.

Our feelings can hold us into this place of worry and anxiety, of fear, even despair. So if you're waiting until you feel like praising, you're going to wait a really long time. It's action that moves us to motivation. So often we need to act first and then our feelings follow. So maybe for you the first step is just making the decision to praise God today. That you will praise him. Not knowing sure how, but take that step, make that decision. Praise is a relationship. Praise brings us to a place of surrender and praise is for us. It changes us. So practically speaking, how can we improve our praise life?

Well, first you can start by remembering that this is a relationship. It's all about a relationship with God. So you speak from the place of a relationship. Tell God that you love him and then tell him why. "Father, I love you. You are such a good, good father and Lord, as I look at my life, I see that you've just been so good to me, especially at the places that I've needed you most." Share the joy and the significance of what it is meant to be in relationship with God. "I praise you. God, you never leave me. You never give up on me. You're so patient and loving with me. God, even when I'm unfaithful, you are faithful and there is no one and nothing in my life like that. You're amazing."

Second use scripture. And here are five Psalms that I would recommend for you to read over. So write them down and read them a little bit later. Include them in your praise, personalize them, say them out loud. Scripture helps us find the words of praise. It helps us express our praise and reading through the Psalms is a great way to improve your praise life. They're brutally honest. And even when reading through them, even at the saddest moments, you just get this sense that they're just this volcano of praise, that's ready to erupt. Even our lament can be an opportunity for praise.

Third, listen to praise songs. Listen, when you're working out or maybe when you're on a hike or you're walking somewhere. Find a place, find a special place in your house, in a room, in your car where you can just freely join in, where you can celebrate God, enjoy God, sing praises to God without feeling inhibited. And I realize that music isn't for everyone. And so for those of you who are in that place, I'd encourage you to think about some of your most favorite hymns, look up the lyrics or look up scripture and memorize those. Then once a day, just

meditate on those words and let those words lead you in praise of your father. So those are three things that you can do to kind of improve your praise life.

Psalms 150 ends with this really interesting twist, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." This is the last line in Psalm 150. And in fact, it's the last line and the whole book of Psalms. Laments and praises prayers and confessions. And the last line in the entire book is "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

Several Years ago, I was on a mission where we worshiped in an Orthodox church and the church inside was just, it was just beautiful. It was ornate incense from the priest's censor was filling the room, the bells on the bottom of his robe jingled as he walked around. It was almost more than my Presbyterian senses could handle. Well, there are no pews, nor chairs in a Orthodox church like that. So everyone is standing. And at one point in the service, everyone suddenly knelt down on the hard marble floor to pray. Hundreds of people. And so I did the same.

Now I have a bad knee. So I was very aware of how long we knelt until we could finally stand again. And it wasn't long after we had finally got to stand when we were directed to kneel back down again for a second long prayer on a hard marble floor. Well, it was then that I realized that it was Holy Trinity Sunday. So we were probably going to pray a third time. Well, as soon as we stood up again, I started limping my way for the door. It was a race against time and I lost, because suddenly everybody dropped down to their knees again, and I was stuck just standing there. And there was no room for me to kneel as well. I swear. There really wasn't any room.

So it was a little awkward at first. I was just trying not to stand on anybody. But as I looked around, I saw that there was this woman also standing, standing in front of me. Her arms were stretched out and lifted high. Her eyes were closed. Her face was radiant. She was worshiping the Lord. Filled with the joy and the peace of the Lord. And it was like God was saying to me in that moment, "Look see there, that's my agenda. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."

Only one thing is going to rescue this world of ours, worship. When everyone everywhere, every people, every nation surrender, throw up their hands and praise the one true mighty God. The book of Psalms ends with what sounds like a great commission. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." Only what's missing in the book of Psalms is the go imperative. That's the only difference. How will everything that breath, praise the Lord unless those who know the Lord go and tell them.

God knew that a relationship with us would cost him. So he sent his son Jesus to live among us. He came to show us the goodness of our heavenly father and his great love for us. And in return, the people whipped him, beat him and hung him on a cross to die. He paid the full price for our debt, for the debt we owe for our sin. Then three days later, Jesus rose again, he died the death that we owe in order that we could live the life that he lives.

Praise is always an encounter with the living God. Not to fill God up with us, but to fill us up with God, with his presence, with his power, so that we can enjoy him and worship him with our lives. Everything that has breath praise the Lord that's God's global agenda. So what's one easy step that you can take today to improve your praise life. Praise moves us from pain to promise, from hurt to hope, from despair to trust, from doubt to faith.

Praise fills us with God's joy, his peace, his courage. Praise confirms that we are loved, not despised, found, not abandoned, recovered, not forgotten, redeemed, not forsaken. We are eternal, not temporary, children of the living God, not orphans, conquerors, not conquered. Hallelujah, praise the Lord. So Jesus, would you reveal yourself more and more to us? Would you help us in this language of praise that we could know you, experience you, experience the depths of who you are. Fill us with your joy, fill us with your peace. We pray it in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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Discussion Questions:

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1. According to Psalm 150, where, how do we Praise and what do we Praise the Lord for?
2. What image does the phrase "everything that has breath praise the Lord" create for you? What is God's agenda?
3. What is Praise and why is it so important?
4. What is your favorite way to Praise the Lord?
5. What is one way you can apply this Psalm to your life today?