

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: God Goes Before Us**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **Psalms 150 ESV**

Praise the LORD!  
Praise God in his sanctuary;  
    praise him in his mighty heavens!  
<sup>2</sup> Praise him for his mighty deeds;  
    praise him according to his excellent greatness!  
<sup>3</sup> Praise him with trumpet sound;  
    praise him with lute and harp!  
<sup>4</sup> Praise him with tambourine and dance;  
    praise him with strings and pipe!  
<sup>5</sup> Praise him with sounding cymbals;  
    praise him with loud clashing cymbals!  
<sup>6</sup> Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!  
Praise the LORD!

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### **Transcript:**

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All right, well, hello. Hello everyone. All right. I can see we're a lively crowd. We're going to work on that for a minute here. All right, so this is going to be an interactive sermon, so I'm going to need your help because I can't do this alone, okay? So you're going to have to work with me here. All right?

So we're going to read over Psalms 150. That's a scripture, but you're going to help me out. Praise the Lord in Hebrew is hallelujah. So there's going to be certain things that I say, that I read, and afterwards you're going to be.

Hallelujah.

There we go. So are you guys ready? You pumped? Hopefully you're awake. All right, here we go.

So Psalms 150. Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary or in his community center.

Hallelujah.

Oh, you almost had it.

Praise him in his mighty heavens.

Hallelujah.

There we go. There we go.

Praise him for his mighty deeds.

Hallelujah.

Praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Hallelujah.

Praise him with trumpet sounds.

If... Wait a minute now, I didn't put the mic up. Only if you like trumpets, then you're okay. Some of us might have some issues with that.

Praise him with lute and harp.

I don't know who brought your lute or your harp, but praise him with that too.

Praise him with the tambourine and dance.

Hallelujah.

Really? Some dance? Y'all ready? That's what it says. Praise the Lord with some dance. Come on now. We're going to have a contest afterwards. See who can praise him the best. There's going to be no prizes except for some street cred.

Praise him with the strings and pipe. Praise him with the sounding cymbals.

Hey, we got it, little guy.

But praise him with the loud clashing cymbals.

So, if anyone has any problems with drums being in the church, just bust out Psalms 150 and then bring a big clashing cymbal in their face.

Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord.

Hallelujah.

Praise the Lord. Amen.

Bow heads with me. Father in heaven, thank you so much for everything that you've given us, Lord. Thank you so much to everything you've blessed us with, Lord. May even the most of mundane things that we not forget to be grateful to you Lord, for the roof over our head, for the clothes on our backs, for the food on our table, Lord. But most importantly for the breath in our lungs, Lord. As we read here in a Psalms 150, let everything that has breath, that includes us, praise you Lord. And altogether, all God's people said, amen.

Well, in July we went on a mission trip here with BelPres. Hey, biscuits. David, can I remove this thing? Okay, this thing. This thing's making my lips chap. What's going on here? There we go. I tried to do it over there, but they didn't look at me. They were like... I was like...

So I went on this trip in July. It was myself, Tim, who's a member here of BelPres and then Adrian, who is worship leader and singer here from New Hope. And so we've been in contact with Minembwe in Congo because of New Hope and of this continued relationship we have there as there's been violence there with those warring tribes in the area. And people from New Hope who are here are from those different tribes and they're working on reconciliation. They worship together, they're here. They want to bring that same message of reconciliation back to Minembwe. So that was the plan. So as for those of you who know mission trips, but maybe some of you've never been on a mission trip or never led a mission trip, there's a lot of planning that goes into mission trips.

And there needs to be, right? You can't just show up somewhere and be like, "All right, what are we doing here?" I mean there's, depending on how many people are going, there's a lot of documentation, visas, vaccinations, there's airplane tickets, there's transportation, there's lodging, there's all these details you got to work out with. And then depending what you're doing, you might need supplies and all this kind of stuff. So a lot of planning is necessary. And Presbyterians, y'all got a book of order. So y'all do things orderly, which is great because you need that. We need that planning. So along with just the logistics of planning though, there's a lot of prayer involved, right? God, are you truly calling us here? God, are you ordaining this trip? God, we want to go where you're calling us to. So we did all that. We did our due diligence, we did the logistics, we did the planning and we did the praying.

Part of the prayers is like, Lord, open doors. You want us to walk through. Close the doors you don't want us to go through. God, go before us. Well, before we even left this country, we already started hitting roadblocks. Visas were already a mess. I almost didn't get my visa. Tim really didn't almost get his visa. I mean, there was a point where I'm like, Tim, you might have to go to Congo and document it. I'm like, don't worry, brother, I got your back. We'll get you there. Jesus wants you there. We're going to make it happen. But fortunately came down to the wire, everything came through, but it was roadblock after roadblock after roadblock, even before we landed there, for one of our flights to get to another place was canceled. I mean, it was just roadblock after roadblock. It seemed like somebody took all of our plans, they opened up a window and they threw them right out.

But this is where God can work because all of our plans that fell apart, this is where we had to trust in God. Our prayer was, Lord, open doors you want us to go through. Close doors you don't want us to go through. God go before us. So we had to learn to trust in God. And every plan that failed, God seemed to make a better one. Now BelPres, you are in a sermon series for this summer of going through the Psalms. And along with Psalms being Psalms that are in the Bible and there's a lot of them, you're also learning how they can also be prayers. I think, is it nine prayers? There's nine prayers, right, that you can learn. And so some of those prayers are

prayer of praise, lament, prayer of confession, purgatory, prayer. And the last one that I want to go through today is the prayer of remembrance.

And today is going to be a two for one special because everyone likes a deal. So we got Psalms 150, which is a prayer of praise. And then Psalms 105, which is a prayer of remembrance. And the reason why I put these two together is because I think that if we don't have a prayer of remembrance, then we won't get to a really rich and full and true praise. So what is a prayer of remembrance? Why do I say this? Well, prayer of remembrance is what? A prayer where you remember what God has done in your life. And let me just read real quick from Psalms 105 here of what I'm talking about. I'm only going to read the first six because it's long.

And it goes like this, says, "Oh, give thanks to the Lord. Call upon his name, make known God's deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praise to him. Tell of all his wondrous works, glory in his holy name. Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and his strengths. Seek his presence continually. Remember the wondrous works that God has done, God's miracles and the judgments he uttered. Oh offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones." And then it goes on in Psalms 105 and it talks about all the times that God has delivered them, starting from Abraham going almost all the way up to King David, how God delivered them from the Egyptians and how he got them through Exodus. And it just goes through all these things.

But the interesting part of Psalms 105 is it doesn't talk about the mistakes of Israel. It only highlights what God has done. God's goodness, God's greatness, God's mercy. God's wondrous works. This is not a Psalm about us. It is a Psalm solely about what God has done. Now, I can't share all the details of what happened in Africa. If you want to hear more, we're going to have a full mission debrief, I think October 22nd, it'll probably be after service. It'll be in some room. S150, which I kept on calling Psalms 150, S150, just because my brain is hardwired to working here for so long. So you can see where that's going.

But we'll be able to share more videos and photos and you'll be able hear from the other people as well. But one of the things that happened just to highlight a few things that God changed for us is that we were going to have to stay longer. I was going to have to stay longer in Africa because of some flights that got canceled and so we're going to have to change my flight. And it was going to be a ridiculous amount of money we think, to change my flight.

So we went to this airline, and for those of you who don't know Adrian. Adrian's famous in Africa. He's this famous worship leader there. So everybody knows him. And we walk in there and this woman recognized him of course. And so we kind of told our situation, I'm sitting there and she talked about what we could do with my flight. And then she turned to me, she says, "You know what? I don't want this blessing to pass me by, so I want to change your flight for free." Because she knew what we were doing for Mission. And we were like...

Hallelujah.

Yo. Clearly God at work. And we were like, "My goodness." We were so happy. We're like, "Oh, I don't know how we can thank you." She's like, "Well," she goes, "Because I'm a pastor." We're like, "What?" She's like, "Yes, I'm a pastor and my husband's a pastor. I don't want this blessing to pass us by." So Adrian says, "You know what? If we can work it out when I come back, I'm going to sing at your church." And she's like, "Oh, that would be amazing." She said, "We actually, my husband and I, we run a home church that's next to our house that is strictly to reach the young people of Kigali and disciple them." We're like, "Oh, funny thing is we're from BelPres and our current vision is to focus on young families and to disciple people." Coincidence, I think not.

And so we're like, "Yes, of course." And Adrian's like, "Yeah, I'll come and sing." He's like, "And Sergio, he's a lay pastor, he can come and preach." He's like, "Oh, really?" And I'm like, "Yeah, whatever. However plans are working out when we come back, I don't know. Yeah, if I make it back to Africa, I'll come and preach at your church."

And I was like, "Just tell us when." She's like, "How about Thursday?" We're like, "All right, well let's look at our plans. Those are out the window. We're free on Thursday." And it was amazing. It was this room that these people had built next to their house, about 60 people there. All young people, all from teenagers to young adults all seeking God. Adrian brought the house down with his worship. I got to preach to these young, and the spirit was moving in that place. It was such a blessing. But nothing that we had planned. We don't always know what God is doing in the moment, but at some point we will get to the other side of that and we can look back at like, okay, I see where God was working.

Now in Minembwe, where we were going. So we're working with Congo Peace. And the reason why we've developed that relationship there is obviously because the people here that are from different tribes, these warring tribes, they're here and they're working on reconciliation together. And they want to bring that message back to Minembwe and the Congo about reconciliation. So Congo Peace strictly works on reconciliation work. That's all it does. Its staff members are from different tribes, people who are fighting with each other. BelPres, you've helped, you've raised money to buy land so they can cultivate together from different tribes where temporarily they're hosting orphans in the reconciliation center that was built. All these orphans are from different tribes. We're building a school that's not quite done yet. All from again to help and educate members from different tribes. And that is the work that's happening there.

So what we went to go do was to check up on these projects and as well to develop this relationship, continued relationship with the people in Minembwe. This is me with the orphans. They're so sweet. It's hard. And also inspiring. Now the thing about me is that I come from poverty. And I still have family that are in poverty. So poverty is not something that kind of shakes me. It's not that I'm desensitized to poverty, it's just that I understand how the world

works. I've seen it. I've been around the world and my family, it comes from that. So it's not the thing that ultimately gives me a culture shock. And if you haven't noticed, I'm a people's person. So what does affect me is people. Talking with people, hearing their stories, seeing what they're going through. That does affect me. And so one of the things that I want to share with you was I got to preach a lot there. I was the official pastor for BelPres there. And I got to preach a lot.

But the last time that I preached was in this church, Ilundu. And the way things are set up there, it's just different culture. People are separated there. The men and the elders on one side, the youth and the kids are in the back and then the women are on the right side and then the leaders are upfront. And it was an amazing service. There was these choirs that were coming together that were singing and they were singing these prayers, prayers of gratitude, prayers of Thanksgiving, prayers of lament. And it was choir after choir and just, I mean it was breaking my heart. The orphans came and sang and they sang these songs lament of how God will one day deliver and how God has not betrayed them, how God is with them. And there was this other choir that came together. There's not one person that I spoke with there that hadn't lost someone to violence.

I'm sure there's somebody there, but not ones that we talked with. Even our own contact, both of his parents were killed on the same day when he was 15 years old. So he was orphaned at a very young age. So this violence has just been going on for so long. And this group of people from different tribes, all who had recently lost somebody, decided to form a choir together and sing together as reconciliation work. Oh, my goodness. It was so inspiring but also heartbreaking at the same time. And while I was watching this, I had front row seats to all these mothers and all these women who, to the right of me, just right there. And as this was going on, I was looking over at them and they're just crying. Some of them are covering their face. And the sorrow, the sadness and the heartbreak that was going through these women just broke my heart. It was the last time that I was preaching that I'd already preached, I don't know, six, seven times at that point. And it was very spirit filled and it was amazing to preach there. No time limit.

I got to be as loud as I wanted. I had a whole stage here. There was a whole round stage that I just walked all the way around. I mean I got to preach exactly I wanted. And Adrian says like, "Yo, I didn't know you're a Pentecostal preacher." And I'm like, "Oh, that's because y'all don't give me enough time to be up there." I was like, "I got to preach naturally how I wanted to." But this place at Ilundu, I was like, I'm not going to be able to preach. I mean, my heart was so broken, I was trying to hide my tears. I was like, there's no way I'm going to be able to preach. And everything that I had planned for that day just basically went right out my head. I knew I was going to preach on the Shunammite woman and I knew that I was going to highlight the women because that is something that kept on falling upon my heart after group after group that we met.

It's the women there that really just kind of worked on my heart. So I've just felt God say, "Well you need to speak to the women." And so I got up and I preached and I already told them. I was like, "I am very emotional. I don't know if I'm going to get through this." And the energy that was in that place just went. As I got up to speak very quietly and very slowly just so I would stop from crying. And what I told those women, I'm like, "You don't see this, but I stand here. I stand on the shoulders of my mother because my father was not a man of God. It was my mother's faith who's got me through. It is my mother's faith who taught me how to pray. It is her faith who taught me how to persevere. It's her faith that has made me a resilient Christian. I stand here before you only because of my mother. I cannot take credit, but it is her who got me here. And I want you to know that God hears the cries of mothers."

Along for the Shunammite woman, I also was highlighting in 2 Kings when Israel was under siege and the king came while they were basically starving. And there was these mothers who cry out to the king this horrible story that I can't share. And it's finally them who finally get the king to do something because the prophets already told him he shouldn't be doing what he's doing and he didn't do anything about it. But it was the cries of mothers that finally put him into action. I said, "God hears your cries and it is my mother who got me here. And I understand that many of you have prayed for something to happen here in Minembwe. I understand that we may look like we are answers to those prayers just because of our presence."

But just let it be known. We cannot take credits because there's no way anybody could have planned that me, a kid from San Luis Mexico immigrated to Seattle, Washington, stayed a Christian, somehow got involved in churches on the east side. That's where our Latino church ended up. Then got into AV and audio, then got a job at a Presbyterian church in Bellevue of all places because from Seattle. And then working through just how God works, somehow I ended up at a pulpit preaching, which was never part of my plan, that somehow I started working with immigrants who were from Africa, who then of course started talking about, Hey, there's stuff we need to go do back in Africa in a place called Minembwe, which I never even knew existed four years ago.

And then I was just in this meeting to hear about what's going on in Minembwe. And somehow I become the pastor who comes to this mission trip. And now I'm standing in a church I've never heard of on a hill in front of all of you. Nothing that I could have planned myself nor anyone could have thought would ever happen. I am only here because of God's grace. I am only here because of God's wondrous works. I am only here because of the faith that my mother gave me to stay on the path, to follow God and go where he leads you.

Hallelujah. And now that I'm here, I cannot take credit. I am not your answer to prayer. God is answered to prayer. There will be more to come. And one day, I don't know if it's a generation from now, I don't know if it's two or three generations now. But one day you will not have to worry about your kids going to school and not coming home. You will not have to worry about your men going to herd their cows and not coming home. You will not have to worry about

violence one day in the future. And whenever that happens, you may not even remember my name. You may not remember which pastors came. You won't remember what church came. But what you will remember is that when you prayed to God, when you called out to God, God answered your prayer. And the step after step after step, God delivered you over and over again because God is the one who gets the credit. We speak about his good deeds and his wondrous works. We pray and we remember what God has done.

And that leads us to a richer and fuller praise. So many of you here have stories of how God has delivered you. If you've been a Christian for a while. I myself, I've said it before, I'm a miracle child. I should be dead. My mother, unfortunately, the infant mortality rate in Mexico, there was an older sister of mine who died just not too much after birth. And I myself was dying and somehow God delivered me. So every day that I wake up is a blessing that God has given me. I know that before I've even done anything that day before, I've even had a chance to sin that day, God has already blessed me with a day of life. That is the good God works that He's done in my life. I don't care what anybody says. I don't believe in God. Okay, that's fine. You don't have to. But as for me in my house, we serve the Lord.

And the thing that was the culture shock for me was I was in a place where the world was falling apart for them. And they had so much faith and so much praise and so much energy going towards what is God going to do? Where is God working? How can we follow God's path? We know God will deliver us. And coming back to the states, we are lacking some of that. Sometimes for us, it does feel like the world is falling apart. I understand that. So I want to show you what I mean by this praise. So I got this little clip here from Ilundu Church of their praise. It's called [inaudible]. They do this for like 10 minutes, 12 minutes. This is the calm one. This is early on. And not only is it a worship service, it's a workout program. There's all the women that I was talking about. And they just praise and praise and praise God.

Talk about Psalms 150 dance. Come on now. No words just dancing, praising God. That went on, that worship service went on for six hours. They praised the Lord. Now, let's do it. And to be honest, we were looking at our watch, Tim and I, and they were just 10 minutes short of six hours. I'm like, come on guys, you can pull out 10 more minutes. But all of our hearts are racing. We're like, I don't think I can do 10 more minutes. Preaching and all this kind of stuff. What you don't see here is that we sometimes feel like the world is falling apart here. Well, we were in a place where the world was falling apart. What you can't see there is outside that church where people with machine guns and RPGs protecting them so they could worship. What BelPres, what you have been a part of with helping with Congo Peace is we rebuilt a church in Ilundu, which was under attack and half of it was destroyed.

But where the devil works, God works more. And that building that was destroyed that we raised money for is now twice as big. And when we went to go inaugurate it, it was packed. The windows don't have glass. So the windows were open and there were people outside just trying to look in. And the quote from them says, you are bringing back hope to Minembwe



because if we can't worship God, we feel like we will lose all hope. I don't want to talk too bad about the United States of America, but we need joy like that here. We need you. When we practice Psalms 105 and remembering God's goods work and sharing that with other people says, tell the people of God's good deeds, tell them of those wondrous works. When we do that, then we can praise together. Because there's many things that you have gone through that if you just speak with somebody else, you might find out that they might be going through something similar and you can tell them and testify, I went through the same thing or similar and God delivered me from that.

Let's praise together. Instead of running out of here after the service, talk with one another. And I don't want to shame the people online, but we need to be together because this is how we do this. There's ways to do it online. I understand, but at least here in this building, we need to praise. And when we share this, when we share this prayer of remembrance, we will lead to joy and praise. And we need to do that together. Bow your heads with me. Father in heaven, thank you so much for all the blessings you give us, Lord. You do not see us as victims, Lord. And we have been victims, some of us, of things, terrible things, abuse, death, losing our house or career. Yes, we've been victim of things, but that is not how you see us, because you are always at work and one day you will deliver us from that.

So you see us as victors, Lord, you give us hope to look forward to your promises. When we look back at what you've done in our lives, we can look forward to life. I don't know how it's going to work. I don't know what it's going to do, but I'm going to put my faith in God. And I understand that God will deliver me from these things. Lord, we don't know how it's going to exactly be. But you, God are an amazing and wonderful God who was always at work in our lives and we will praise you together. And together we all said, hallelujah.

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### **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Opening Question:** Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What can you look back on your life and clearly see that God was at work and carried you through?
- When you think of these victories does it lead you to praise?
- Do you share what God has done in your life with others?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.