

My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever. (Psa 145:21)

Unless you've been under a rock for the last several weeks – at least before it became watch-worthy to see people stand around a casket while other people stand in line for a day or more to see the casket – you've had to have heard about the launch and successful deployment of the James Webb Space Telescope. If you've heard of the JWST, then you've heard blather about how we're going to now be able to “look back in time to the beginning of universe”. There has been quite a bit of hub bub over whether some of the initial images bring into doubt the “Big Bang” theory on how the universe came into being, even, which of course is awesome to see their so-called “science” false religion called into question. In a nerdy way, it's fascinating stuff.

There is no doubt that this machine is an accomplishment of engineering and creativity. To place a device some 932,000 miles from Earth, be able to communicate with it and get high resolution images of stars, planets and galaxies sent back from it is an absolutely amazing thing. It's amazing a little like the tower of Babel was an amazing feat of engineering and construction in its day.

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there. And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth. And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (Gen 11:1-9)

Man has always thought himself clever and brilliant, especially when it comes to creating or explaining things. His pride and arrogance know no limits as the tower of Babel incident shows. To think that they could reach up to heaven, to call God into question for the flood and stop Him from wiping out the human race again by building a marvel of modern architecture is rather astounding.

It's not really that much different than what we have in today's world. The men we live amongst believe they know better than God and will do all they can to ignore the

simple truth they have in front of them. They will go to great lengths to do seemingly impossible things. Just look at these pictures captured by the Webb telescope



These are absolutely astounding; breathtaking even. The bottom left shows how far we've advanced in our ability to make something like this, with the left half showing Hubble's view of the same region of space Webb is looking at. It's truly astonishing, no doubt about it.

When I see these pictures, the first thing I think is not how amazing all these people are. If the telescope taking the image is amazing, what about what is captured in the image? Look at those stars and galaxies. Look at Jupiter appearing as we've never seen it before. No, what I thought of when I saw these images was this:

“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.” (Neh 9:6)

“I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.” (Isa 45:12)

“Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.” (Psa 148:1-5)

I look at these images and praise God for His majesty and power. And so should all mankind. And not just these images but look around you every day and be amazed. He put these things right in front of our faces that we can't reasonably explain and gave us the ability to build a thing that can see these astoundingly far away objects in such clarity – all of which were made by His hand. The first thing that should cross our mind every day is to praise Him.

I spent some time talking to the praise of God in May 2021 in my sermon to the graduating class, and some of the things I said there, I'll say again. I don't like being overly repetitive, but this idea of praise has been on my mind a lot lately, and in these days where we are so surrounded by sin and those who would draw us into it, I think it is important at times to focus on ourselves a bit. There are clear and obvious things we can do to be separate, to make ourselves different. Properly praising God is one of those things. Being separate needn't be some artificial display or something that you do to draw attention to yourself. Praise is important to our public and private worship of the Lord and is done explicitly and with intent.

The nature of praise

The first thing to consider about the praise of God is to remember 'who' we're talking about here. This is the Creator of all things. This is the Supreme Ruler of all things. There is an idea of interacting with a King we have no understanding of in this country. In these times where everyone believes whatever they think or say has more value than anyone else's thoughts and words, the idea that someone could have the final word based on who they are is just foreign. The idea that there could be someone who

has authority and power over you, to silence or command you is openly rejected – especially in this nation. We’ve seen a little of what that looks like in the scrutinized coverage of King Charles III and the death of Queen Elizabeth II, but it’s still a little tough to wrap our brains around in a practical manner, maybe.

This is submission. That’s the main problem the modern world has with it. It is acknowledgement of God as our Supreme Ruler. Look again at Charles III. I don’t care much about what he says on a day-to-day basis because I don’t acknowledge him as my king, he has no practical impact on my daily life, and no rule over me. Charles needs that acknowledgement and submission to him as a condition of his holding power. God Almighty needs no acquiescence on the part of men to have that power ultimately of course. But men, not seeing God as they see the material things in front of them, see no need to submit to Him, thinking they can remove His power from over their heads.

But properly praising God requires submission, that is part of its nature. What praise is there to give to a being you have no true belief in or see no need to submit to?

By its very nature, the true and proper praise of God is an expression of awe at the gap between His power and our weakness.

To praise men is not the same as it is to properly praise God. I think the Webb Telescope offers an excellent opportunity to see that difference. I congratulate those men and women who worked on this impressive device since 2004 and finally got it into space this last year, collecting these and even more fabulous images – it’s not something I probably could do. Good job.

In comparison to the things which it is designed to view, however, that work is paltry, sloppy and ephemeral. We’re talking about a device that might last ten years, looking at things that have been kept in their proper place – planets orbiting stars, circling in galaxies, all according to God’s proper order – for thousands of years. No intervention, no hands of men keeping them there. They are just **there** and we get to see them.

In that light, how could your praise of God possibly compare to how you praise men? We’re not talking about a pat on the back or a thumbs up here. The nature of praising God starts with the acknowledgement that God **is** the creator and ordainer of literally all things, that there is no power above Him or equal to Him in all the universe.

If you look at the things God has made – which of course is everything in the natural world – and are not awed by the majesty and awesome might it took to make them, you are simply not looking at them the right way. If you don’t see His destructive hand and fear Him, acknowledge His power and His might, you’re looking at God the wrong way.

“Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen.” (Deu 10:20-21)

Praising God is not some trite and rote thing. You don't say “Praise God” or “Praise Jesus” some number of times per day and meet your quota. This is adoration requiring an understanding of why you are expressing the adoration of God. Just saying “praise God” is empty and vain.

Why to praise God

If you really have to ask, I have to question your sincerity and truthfulness in calling yourself a Christian. These two passages sum it up nicely, I think:

“To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.” (Psa 145:12)

“Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him. For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psa 33:8-9)

Here is the God of majesty, who spake and it was done – what did He speak? How about this

“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” (Gen 1:3)

When was the last time you spoke and anything was created, much less that necessary component of life!

Here's a thing to consider. I used those magnificent pictures of far-away stars and planets to make the point that God's creation is majestic and awe-inspiring on its face. I could have used pictures of a blade of grass, or a hummingbird in flight, or a cloud. No work of God's hands is named as more splendid or majestic than another. At every part of the creation, remember *“God saw that good”* (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). The “it was” in the KJV is interpolated. God saw the good He did – by His essential nature – in creating these things precisely as He did. His majesty was and is on full display in every literal thing He created in the universe.

This is such a simple idea, that a being of such superiority to us is deserving of our praise, I can't really see a lot more to say about it.

Ways to praise

How we praise God is a matter of debate amongst a lot of expositors, but to me it is relatively simple

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb 13:15)

“To the chief Musician upon Muthlabben, A Psalm of David. I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works.” (Psa 9:1)

The reason for the debate is whether we praise God with the works of our hands or things that we produce. If you're an artist, or a cabinetmaker, do you praise God by the things you create?

I think the obvious answer here is 'no'. You certainly can **glorify** God by using the talents and skills He gives you, like Aholiab and Bezaleel did

“And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom, even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it:” (Exo 36:2)

But praise is a different thing. I like something Matthew Henry says in his discussion of Psalm 150 – our praise should be *“non musica chordula, sed cor - not a melodious string, but a melodious heart”*. Our singing and expressing of praise comes from the things He has created – our voices and our hearts, not things that **we** create.

Our praise of God should be a heartfelt expression, not a formulaic thing or something you have to do some number of times a day with a specific phrase. Consider

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” (Luk 6:45)

I personally think the best tool we can use to praise God, especially in the congregation, is the Psalms. They are words of praise divinely inspired and not tainted by the hands of men, where false doctrine can slip in. They should, more than any other words, draw our hearts directly to Him because they are His words intended to do just that.

If your heart isn't tuned to praising God in a moment, it is a thing to ask yourself why. It's not a thing I nor anyone else can judge – it's a matter of your heart. But you have to do that work and know where your heart is as you go along in your day, and especially when you come into this tabernacle to assemble. Which leads us to discuss

When to praise

Putting it simply, we should seek opportunity to praise God whenever we can. If it were possible, we would not be out of line to literally do nothing but praise Him.

“David's Psalm of praise. I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom.” (Psa 145:1-12)

For ever and ever means not just throughout the fulness of time but a constancy in that time. If we praise God constantly, then that means we will be praising Him in all manner of situations.

Praising Him when seeing His great creation and its elements great and small means we must also praise Him when we see the ends of things. Whether in great judgmental tragedy or in personal loss, our praise is due him.

Why? Because His greatness and majesty are no different in either creation or destruction. He has made the stars and dictated the date they will be extinguished, as He has fashioned us in the womb and dictates our departure, both timing and means. In His wisdom and determination He has decided from eternity past that now is the moment for that loss.

There's no room for us, as the creation, to differ our view of the Creator's will because it seems good or bad in our estimation

“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom 9:20)

Let us praise Him in every moment we find available to us to do so. Let us do it as individuals, as families, as a body.