

Exposition on Psalm 135

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of praising and worshiping God, and explores the reasons for doing so, including God's goodness, sovereignty, and election of His people.

Scripture: Psalm 134:1-135

Topics: "Praise And Worship", "Gods Judgment"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the importance of praising the Lord, highlighting the goodness of God and the privilege of serving Him. He emphasizes the need for gratitude, acknowledging God's greatness and the wonders He has done among His people. Augustine also reflects on God's judgment, the folly of idol worship, and the transformation brought about by faith in Christ, urging all to bless the Lord and give Him thanks.

Transcript

1. Very pleasant ought it be to us, and we should rejoice because it is pleasant, to which this Psalm exhorts us. For it says, Praise the name of the Lord Psalm 134:1. And it immediately appends the reason, why it is just to praise the name of the Lord. Praise the Lord, you servants. What more just? What more worthy? What more thankful?...For if He teaches His own servants who have deserved well of Him, the preachers of His Word, the rulers of His Church, the worshippers of His name, the obeyers of His command, that in their own conscience they should possess the sweetness of their life, lest they be corrupted by the praise or disheartened by the reproach of men; how much the more is He above all, the unchangeable One, who teaches these things, neither the greater if you praise, or the less if you reproach. For you will do nothing out of place, by praising your Lord, as servants. And if you were to be for ever only servants, you ought to praise the Lord; how much more ought ye servants to praise the Lord, that you may hereafter gain the privilege of sons?

2. ...Therefore, You who stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God, praise the Lord Psalm 134:2. Be thankful; you were without, and you stand within. Since then ye stand, is it a small thing for you to think where He should be praised, who raised you when you were cast down, and caused you to stand in His house, to know Him, and to praise Him? Is it a small boon, that we stand in the house of the Lord?...If one thinks of this, and is not unthankful, he will utterly despise himself in comparison with the love of his Lord, who has done so great things for him. And since he has nothing wherewith to repay God for so great benefits, what remains for him but to give Him thanks, not to repay Him? It belongs to the

very act of thanksgiving, to receive the cup of the Lord, and to call upon His name. For what can the servant repay the Lord for all that He has given him?

3. What reason shall I give why you should praise Him? Because the Lord is good Psalm 134:3. Briefly in one word is here explained the praise of the Lord our God. The Lord is good; good, not in the same manner as the things which He here made are good. For God made all things very good; Genesis 1:31 not only good, but also very good. He made the sky and earth, and all things which are in them good, and He made them very good. If He made all these things good, of what sort is He who made them?...

4. How far can we speak of His goodness? Who can conceive in his heart, or apprehend how good the Lord is? Let us however return to ourselves, and in us recognise Him, and praise the Maker in His works, because we are not fit to contemplate Him Himself. And in hope that we may be able to contemplate Him, when our heart has been purified by faith, that hereafter it may rejoice in the Truth; now as He cannot be seen by us, let us look at His works, that we may not live without praising Him. So I have said, Praise the Lord, for He is good; sing praises unto His Name, for He is sweet....He is Mediator, and thereupon is sweet. What is sweeter than angels' food? How can God not be sweet, since man ate angels' food? For men and angels live not on different meat. That is truth, that is wisdom, that is the goodness of God, but you can not enjoy it in like wise with the angels....That man might eat angels' food, the Creator of the angels was made man. If you taste, sing praises; if you have tasted how sweet the Lord is, sing praises; if that which you have tasted has a good savour, praise it; who is so unthankful to cook or purveyor, as not to return thanks by praising what he tastes, if he be pleased by any food. If we are not silent on such occasions, shall we be silent concerning Him, who has given us all things?...

5. For the Lord has chosen Jacob to Himself, Israel for His own possession Psalm 134:4....Let not Jacob therefore extol himself, let him not boast himself, or ascribe it to his own merits. He was known before, predestinated before, elected before, not elected for his own merits, but found out, and gifted with life by the grace of God. So with all the Gentiles; for how did the wild-olive deserve, that it should be grafted in, from the bitterness of its berries, the barrenness of its wildness? It was the wood of the wilderness, not of the Lord's field, and yet He of His mercy grafted the wild-olive into the (true) olive. But up to this time the wild-olive was not grafted in.

6. ...Because, says he, I know that the Lord is great, and our God is above all gods Psalm 134:5. If we should say to him, we ask you, explain to us His greatness; would he not perchance answer us, He whom I see is not so very great, if He be able to be expounded by me. Let him then return to His works, and tell us. Let him hold in his conscience the greatness of God, which he has seen, which he has committed to our faith, whither he could not lead our eyes, and enumerate some of the things which the Lord has done here; that unto us, who cannot see His greatness as he can, He may become sweet through the works of His which we can comprehend....

7. All whatsoever the Lord willed, He made in the heaven, and in the earth, in the sea, and in all its deep places Psalm 134:6. Who can comprehend these things? Who can enumerate the works of the Lord in the heaven and earth, in the sea, and in all deep places? Yet if we cannot comprehend them all, we should believe and hold them without question, because whatever creature is in heaven, whatever is in earth, whatever is in the sea and in all deep places, has been made by the Lord....

8. Raising the clouds from the ends of the earth Psalm 134:7. We see these works of God in His creation. For the clouds come from the ends of the earth to the midst thereof, and rain; you scan not whence they

arise. Hence the prophet signifies this, from the ends of the earth, whether it be from the bottom, or from the circumference of the ends of the earth, whencesoever He wills He raises the clouds, only from the earth. He has made lightnings into rain. For lightnings without rain would frighten you, and bestow nothing on you. He makes lightnings unto rain. It lightens, and you tremble; it rains, you rejoice. He has made lightnings unto rain. He who terrified you, Himself causeth that you should rejoice. Who brings the winds out of His treasures, their causes are hidden, you know not whence they come. When the wind blows, you feel it; why it blows, or from what treasure of His wisdom it is brought forth, you know not; John 3:8 yet you owe to God the worship of faith, for it would not blow unless He had bidden who made it, unless He had brought it forth who created it.

9. We see therefore these things in that work of His; we praise, we marvel at, we bless God; let us see what He has done among men for His people. Who smote the first-born of Egypt Psalm 134:8. But withal those divine doings are told which you might love, those are not told which you might fear. Attend, and see that also when He is angry, He does what He wills. From man even unto beast. He sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, O Egypt! Psalm 134:9. You know, you have read what the hand of the Lord did by Moses in Egypt, to crush and cast down the proud Egyptians, on Pharaoh and on all his servants. Little did He in Egypt: what did He after His people was led out thence? Who smote many nations Psalm 134:10, who possessed that land, which God willed to give His people. And slew mighty kings, Sehon king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan, and all the kingdoms of Canaan Psalm 134:11. All these things which the Psalm records simply, do we read likewise in others of the Lord's books, and there the hand of the Lord is great. When you see what has been done to the wicked, take heed lest it be done to you....But when the good man sees what the wicked has suffered, let him cleanse himself from all iniquity, lest he fall into a like punishment, a like chastisement. Then you have thoroughly understood these things. What did God then? He drove out the wicked, And he gave their land for an inheritance, even an inheritance to Israel His servant Psalm 134:12.

10. Then follows the loud cry of His praise. Your Name, O Lord, is for ever and ever Psalm 134:13, after all these things which You have done. For what do I see that You have done? I behold Your creation which You have made in heaven, I behold this lower part, where we dwell, and here I see Your gifts of clouds, and winds, and rain. I regard Your people; Thou leddest them from the house of bondage, and did signs and wonders upon their enemies. You punished those who caused them trouble, You drove the wicked from their land, You killed their kings, You gave their land to Your people: I have seen all these things, and filled with joy have said, Lord, Your Name is for ever and ever....

11. All these things then did God overthrow, in the body at that time, when our fathers were led out of the land of Egypt, in the spirit now. Nor does His Hand cease until the end. Therefore deem not that these mighty deeds of God were then finished and have ceased. Your Name, O Lord, he says, is for ever. That is, Your loving-kindness ceases not, Your hand ceases not for ever from doing these things, which then You did afore declare in a figure. But they are written for our admonition, on whom the end of the ages has come. 1 Corinthians 10:11 One generation and another generation; the generation by which we are made the faithful, and are born again by baptism; the generation by which we shall rise again from the dead, and shall live with the Angels for ever. Your Memorial, O Lord, is above this generation, and above that; for neither does He now forget to call us, nor then will He forget to crown us.

12. The Lord has judged His people, and will be called upon among His servants Psalm 134:14. Already has He judged the people. Save the final judgment, the people of the Jews is judged. What is judged? The just are taken away, the unjust are left. But if I lie, or am thought to lie, because I have said, it is already

judged, hear the Lord saying, I have come for judgment into this world, that they who see not may see, and they who see may be made blind. John 9:39 The proud are made blind, the lowly are enlightened. Therefore, He has judged His people. Isaiah spoke the judgment. And now, thou house of Jacob, come ye, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Isaiah 2:5 This is a small matter; but what follows? For He has put away His people, the house of Israel. The house of Jacob is the house of Israel; for he who is Jacob, the same is Israel....Therefore God had judged His people, by separating the evil and the good; that is to say, He shall be called upon among His servants. By whom? By the Gentiles. For how vast are the nations who have come in by faith. How many farms and desert places now come in to us? They come thence no one can tell how numerous; they would believe. We say to them, What will you? They answer, To know the glory of God. Believe, my brethren, that we wonder and rejoice at such a claim of these rustic people. They come I know not whither, roused up by I know not whom. How shall I say, I know not by whom? I know indeed by whom, because He says, No one comes to Me, save whom the Father draws. John 6:44 They come suddenly from the woods, the desert, the most distant and lofty mountains, to the Church; and many of them, nay, near all hold this language, so that we see of a truth that God teaches them within. The prophecy of Scripture is fulfilled, when it says, And they shall all be taught of God. Isaiah 54:13 We say to them, What do ye long for? And they answer, To see the glory of God. John 6:45 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 They believe, they are sanctified, they will to have clergy ordained for them. Is it not fulfilled, and He will be called upon among His servants?

13. Lastly, after all that arrangement and dispensation, the Spirit of God turns itself to reproaching and ridiculing those idols, which are now ridiculed by their very worshippers. The idols of the Gentiles are silver and gold Psalm 134:15. As God made all these things, who made whatever He would in heaven and earth, what can anything that man makes be, but an object of ridicule, not adoration? Was He perchance about to speak of the idols of the Gentiles, that we might despise them all? Was He about to speak of the idols of the heathen, stones and wood, plaster and pottery? I say not these, they are mean materials. I speak of that which they specially love, that which they specially honour. The idols of the Gentiles are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. Surely it is gold, surely it is silver: because silver glitters, and gold glitters, have they therefore eyes, or do they see?...But as these things are senseless, why make ye men of silver and gold to be gods? See ye not that the gods which you make see not? They have a mouth, and will not speak; they have eyes, and will not see Psalm 134:16; they have ears, and will not hear; neither is there any breath in their mouth Psalm 134:17; they have nostrils, and will not smell; they have hands, and will not work; they have feet, and will not walk. All these things could the carpenter, the silversmith, the goldsmith make, both eyes, and ears, and nostrils, and mouth, and hands, and feet, but he could give neither sight to the eyes, nor hearing to the ears, nor speech to the mouth, nor smell to the nostrils, nor motion to the hands, or going to the feet.

14. And man, you laugh doubtless at what you have made, if you know by whom you are made. But of them who know not, what is said? All they who make them, and all they who trust in them, are like them Psalm 134:18. And ye believe, brethren, that there is a likeness to these idols expressed not in their flesh, but in their inner man. For they have ears, and hear not. God calls to them indeed, He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Matthew 11:15 They have eyes, and see not, for they have the eyes of the body, and not the eyes of faith. Lastly, this prophecy is fulfilled among all the nations....Is it not fulfilled? Is it not seen, as it is written? And they who remain have eyes, and see not; have nostrils, and smell not. They perceive not that savour. We are a good savour of Christ, 2 Corinthians 2:15 as the apostle says everywhere. What profits it, that they have nostrils, and smell not that so sweet savour of Christ? Truly it is done in them, and truly it is said of them, All they who make them, etc.

15. But daily do men believe through the miracles of Christ our Lord; daily the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf are opened, the nostrils of the senseless are breathed into, the tongues of the dumb are loosed, the hands of the palsied are strengthened, the feet of the lame are guided; sons of Abraham are raised up of these stones, Matthew 3:9 to all of whom be it said, Bless the Lord, you house of Israel Psalm 134:19. All are sons of Abraham; and if sons of Abraham are raised up from these stones, it is plain that they are rather the house of Israel who belong to the house of Israel, the seed of Abraham, not by the flesh, but by faith. But even granting that it is said of that house, and the people of Israel is meant, from thence did the Apostles and thousands of the circumcised believe? Bless the Lord, you house of Aaron. Bless the Lord, you house of Levi Psalm 134:20. Bless the Lord, you nations, this is, the house of Israel generally; bless Him, you leaders, this is, the house of Aaron; bless Him, you servants, this is, the house of Levi. What of the other nations? You that fear the Lord, bless the Lord.

16. Let us also with one voice say what follows: Blessed be the Lord out of Zion, who dwells in Jerusalem Psalm 134:21. Out of Zion is Jerusalem too. Zion is watching, Jerusalem the vision of peace. In what Jerusalem will He dwell now? In that which has fallen? Nay, but in that which is our mother, which is in the heavens, of which it is said, The desolate has more children than she which has a husband. For now the Lord is from Zion, because we watch when He will come; now as long as we live in hope, we are in Zion. When our way is ended, we shall dwell in that city which will never fall, because the Lord dwells in her, and keeps her, which is the vision of peace, the eternal Jerusalem; for the praise of which, my brethren, language suffices not; where we shall find no enemy, either within the Church or without the Church, neither in our flesh, nor in our thoughts. For death shall be swallowed up in victory, 1 Corinthians 15:54 and we shall be free to see God in eternal peace, being made citizens of Jerusalem, the city of God.

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