

Exposition on Psalm 148

by St. Augustine

We should praise God with our whole selves, including our voice, life, and deeds, and recognize that God is the Creator and Governor of all things.

Topics: "Worship And Praise", "Eternal Life"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of praising God in both our present life and in the life hereafter, emphasizing the connection between our current practices of praise and prayer and the eternal exaltation of praising God. He highlights the significance of celebrating two seasons - before and after Easter - symbolizing tribulation and bliss, fasting and prayer, and praises and relaxation. St. Augustine urges believers to praise God with their whole selves, not just with words but with their conscience, life, and deeds, emphasizing the need for genuine, heartfelt praise.

Transcript

1. The subject of our meditation in this present life should be the praises of God; for the everlasting exaltation of our life hereafter will be the praise of God, and none can become fit for the life hereafter, who has not practised himself for it now. So then now we praise God, but we pray to Him too. Our praise is marked by joy, our prayer by groans....On account of these two seasons, one, that which now is in the temptations and tribulations of this life, the other, that which is to be hereafter in everlasting rest and exultation; we have established also the celebration of two seasons, that before Easter and that after Easter. That which is before Easter signifies tribulation, in which we now are; that which we are now keeping after Easter, signifies the bliss in which we shall hereafter be. The celebration then which we keep before Easter is what we do now: by that which we keep after Easter we signify what as yet we have not. Therefore we employ that time in fastings and prayer, this present time we spend in praises, and relax our fast. This is the Halleluia which we sing, which, as you know, means (in Latin), Praise ye the Lord. Therefore that period is before the Lord's Resurrection, this, after His Resurrection: by which time is signified the future hope which as yet we have not: for what we represent after the Lord's Resurrection, we shall have after our own. For in our Head both are figured, both are set forth. The Baptism of the Lord sets forth to us this present life of trial, for in it we must toil, be harassed, and, at last, die; but the Resurrection and Glorification of the Lord sets forth to us the life which we are to have hereafter, when He shall come to recompense due rewards, evil to the evil, good to the good. And now indeed all the evil men sing with us, Halleluia; but, if they persevere in their wickedness, they may utter with their lips the song of our life hereafter; but the life itself, which will then be in the reality which now is typified, they cannot obtain,

because they would not practise it before it came, and lay hold on what was to come.

2. Halleluia. Praise the Lord, you say to your neighbour, he to you: when all are exhorting each other, all are doing what they exhort others to do. But praise with your whole selves: that is, let not your tongue and voice alone praise God, but your conscience also, your life, your deeds. For now, when we are gathered together in the Church, we praise: when we go forth each to his own business, we seem to cease to praise God. Let a man not cease to live well, and then he ever praises God....It is impossible for a man's acts to be evil, whose thoughts are good. For acts issue from thought: nor can a man do anything or move his limbs to do anything, unless the bidding of his thought precede: just as in all things which you see done throughout the provinces, whatsoever the Emperor bids goes forth from the inner part of his palace throughout the whole Roman Empire. How great commotion is caused at one bidding by the Emperor as he sits in his palace! He but moves his lips, when he speaks: the whole province is moved, when what he speaks is being executed. So in each single man too, the Emperor is within, his seat is in the heart. If he be good and bids good things, good things are done: if he be bad and bids evil things, evil things are done. When Christ sits there, what can He bid, but what is good? When the devil is the occupant, what can he bid, but evil? But God has willed that it should be in your choice for whom you will prepare room, for God, or for the devil: when you have prepared it, he who is occupant will also rule. Therefore, brethren, attend not only to the sound; when you praise God, praise with your whole selves: let your voice, your life, your deeds, all sing.

3. Praise ye the Lord from heaven Psalm 148:1. As though he had found things in heaven holding their peace in the praise of the Lord, he exhorts them to arise and praise. Never have things in heaven held their peace in the praises of their Creator, never have things on earth ceased to praise God. But it is manifest that there are certain things which have breath to praise God in that disposition wherein God pleases them. For no one praises anything, save what pleases him. And there are other things which have not breath of life and understanding to praise God, but yet, because they also are good, and duly arranged in their proper order, and form part of the beauty of the universe, which God created, though they themselves with voice and heart praise not God, yet when they are considered by those who have understanding, God is praised in them; and, as God is praised in them, they themselves too in a manner praise God.. ..

4. Praise ye the Lord from heaven: praise Him in the high places. First he says, from heaven, then from earth; for it is God that is praised, who made heaven and earth. All in heaven is calm and peaceful; there is ever joy, no death, no sickness, no vexation; there the blessed ever praise God; but we are still below: yet, when we think how God is praised there, let us have our heart there, and let us not hear to no purpose, Lift up your hearts. Let us lift up our heart above, that it become not corrupted on earth: for we take pleasure in what the Angels do there. We do it now in hope: hereafter we shall in reality, when we have come there. Praise Him then in the high places.

5. Praise Him, all you angels of His, praise Him, all His powers Psalm 148:2. Praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all you stars and light Psalm 148:3. Praise Him, you heaven of heavens, and waters that are above the heavens Psalm 148:4. Let them praise the Name of the Lord Psalm 148:5. When can he unfold all in his enumeration? Yet he has in a manner touched upon them all summarily, and included all things in heaven praising their Creator. And as though it were said to him, Why do they praise Him? What has He conferred on them, that they should praise Him? he goes on, for He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created. No wonder if the works praise the Worker, no wonder if the things that are made praise the Maker, no wonder if creation praise its Creator. In this Christ also is mentioned,

though we seem not to have heard His Name....By what were they made? By the Word? John 1:1-2 How does he show in this Psalm, that all things were made by the Word? He spoke, and they were made; He commanded, and they were created. No one speaks, no one commands, save by word.

6. He has established them for the age, and for age upon age Psalm 148:6. All things in heaven, all things above, all powers and angels, a certain city on high, good, holy, blessed; from whence because we are wanderers, we are wretched; whither because we are to return, we are blessed in hope; whither when we shall have returned, we shall be blessed indeed; He has given them a law which shall not pass away. What sort of command, think ye, have things in heaven and the holy angels received? What sort of command has God given them? What, but that they praise Him? Blessed are they whose business is to praise God! They plough not, they sow not, they grind not, they cook not; for these are works of necessity, and there is no necessity there. They steal not, they plunder not, they commit no adultery; for these are works of iniquity, and there is no iniquity there. They break not bread for the hungry, they clothe not the naked, they take not in the stranger, they visit not the sick, they set not at one the contentious, they bury not the dead; for these are works of mercy, and there there is no misery, for mercy to be shown to. O blessed they! Think we that we too shall be like this? Ah! let us sigh, let us groan in sighing. And what are we, that we should be there? Mortal, outcast, abject, earth and ashes! But He, who has promised, is almighty....

7. Let him then turn himself to things on earth too, since he has already spoken the praises of things in heaven. Praise ye the Lord from the earth Psalm 148:7. For wherewith began he before? Praise ye the Lord from heaven: and he went through things in heaven: now hear of things on earth. Dragons and all abysses. Abysses are depths of water: all the seas, and this atmosphere of clouds, pertain to the abyss. Where there are clouds, where there are storms, where there is rain, lightning, thunder, hail, snow, and all that God wills should be done above the earth, by this moist and misty atmosphere, all this he has mentioned under the name of earth, because it is very changeable and mortal; unless ye think that it rains from above the stars. All these things happen here, close to the earth. Sometimes even men are on the tops of mountains, and see the clouds beneath them, and often it rains: and all commotions which arise from the disturbance of the atmosphere, those who watch carefully see that they happen here, in this lower part of the universe....You see then what kind all these things are, changeable, troublous, fearful, corruptible: yet they have their place, they have their rank, they too in their degree fill up the beauty of the universe, and so they praise the Lord. He turns then to them, as though He would exhort them too, or us, that by considering them we may praise the Lord. Dragons live about the water, come out from caverns, fly through the air; the air is set in motion by them: dragons are a huge kind of living creatures, greater there are not upon the earth. Therefore with them he begins, Dragons and all abysses. There are caves of hidden waters, whence springs and streams come forth: some come forth to flow over the earth, some flow secretly beneath; and all this kind, all this damp nature of waters, together with the sea and this lower air, are called abyss, or abysses, where dragons live and praise God. What? Think we that the dragons form choirs, and praise God? Far from it. But do ye, when you consider the dragons, regard the Maker of the dragon, the Creator of the dragon: then, when you admire the dragons, and say, Great is the Lord who made these, then the dragons praise God by your voices.

8. Fire, hail, snow, ice, wind of storms, which do His word Psalm 148:8. Wherefore added he here, which do His word? Many foolish men, unable to contemplate and discern creation, in its several places and rank, performing its movements at the nod and commandment of God think that God does indeed rule all things above, but things below He despises, casts aside, abandons, so that He neither cares for them, nor

guides, nor rules them; but that they are ruled by chance, how they can, as they can: and they are influenced by what they say sometimes to one another: e.g.

If it were God that gave rain, would He rain into the sea? What sort of providence, they say, is this? Getulia is thirsty, and it rains into the sea. They think that they handle the matter cleverly. One should say to them, Getulia does at all events thirst, thou dost not even thirst. For good were it for you to say to God, My soul has thirsted for You. For he that thus argues is already satisfied; he thinks himself learned, he is not willing to learn, therefore he thirsts not.

For if he thirsted, he would be willing to learn, and he would find that everything happens upon earth by God's Providence, and he would wonder at the arrangement of even the limbs of a flea. Attend, beloved. Who has arranged the limbs of a flea and a gnat, that they should have their proper order, life, motion? Consider one little creature, even the very smallest, whatever you will. If you consider the order of its limbs, and the animation of life whereby it moves; how does it shun death, love life, seek pleasures, avoid pain, exert various senses, vigorously use movements suitable to itself!

Who gave its sting to the gnat, for it to suck blood with? How narrow is the pipe whereby it sucks! Who arranged all this? Who made all this? You are amazed at the smallest things; praise Him that is great. Hold then this, my brethren, let none shake you from your faith or from sound doctrine. He who made the Angel in heaven, the Same also made the worm upon earth: the Angel in heaven to dwell in heaven, the worm upon earth to abide on earth. He made not the Angel to creep in the mud, nor the worm to move in heaven.

He has assigned dwellers to their different abodes; incorruption He assigned to incorruptible abodes, corruptible things to corruptible abodes. Observe the whole, praise the whole. He then who ordered the limbs of the worm, does He not govern the clouds? And wherefore rains He into the sea? As though there are not in the sea things which are nourished by rain; as though He made not fishes therein, as though He made not living creatures therein. Observe how the fishes run to sweet water.

And wherefore, says he, does He give rain to the fishes, and sometimes gives not rain to me? That you may consider that you are in a desert region, and in a pilgrimage of life; that so this present life may grow bitter to you, that you may long for the life to come: or else that you may be scourged, punished, amended. And how well does He assign their properties to regions. Behold, since we have spoken of Getulia, He rains here nearly every year, and gives grain every year; here the grain cannot be kept, it soon rots, because it is given every year; there, because it is given seldom, both much is given, and it can be kept for long.

But do you perchance think that God there deserts man, or that they do not there after their own manner of rejoicing both praise and glorify God? Take a Getulian from his country, and set him amid our pleasant trees; he will wish to flee away, and return to his bare Getulia. To all places then, regions, seasons, God has assigned and arranged what fits them. Who could unfold it? Yet they who have eyes see many things therein: when seen, they please; pleasing, they are praised; not they really, but He who made them; thus shall all things praise God.

9. It was in thought of this that the spirit of the Prophet added the words, which do His word. Think not then that these things are moved by chance, which in every motion of theirs obey God. Whither God wills, there the fire spreads, there the cloud hurries, whether it carry in it rain, or snow, or hail. And wherefore does the lightning sometimes strike the mountain, yet strikes not the robber?...Perhaps He yet seeks the robber's

conversion, and therefore is the mountain which fears not smitten, that the man who fears may be changed. Thou also sometimes, when maintaining discipline, smitest the ground to terrify a child. Sometimes too He smites a man, whom He will. But you say to me, Behold, He smites the more innocent, and passes over the more guilty. Wonder not; death, whencesoever it come, is good to the good man. And whence do you know what punishment is reserved in secret for that more guilty man, if he be unwilling to be converted? Would not they rather be scorched by lightning, to whom it shall be said in the end, Depart into everlasting fire? Matthew 25:41 The needful thing is, that you be guileless. Why so? Is it an evil thing to die by shipwreck, and a good thing to die by fever? Whether he die in this way or in that, ask what sort of man he is who dies; ask whither he will go after death, not how he is to depart from life....Whatever then happens here contrary to our wish, you will know that it happens not, save by the will of God, by His providence, by His ordering, by His nod, by His laws: and if we understand not why anything is done, let us grant to His providence that it is not done without reason: so shall we not be blasphemers. For when we begin to argue concerning the works of God, why is this? why is that? and, He ought not to have done this, He did this ill; where is the praise of God? You have lost your Halleluia. Regard all things in such wise as to please God and praise the Creator. For if you were to happen to enter the workshop of a smith, you would not dare to find fault with his bellows, his anvils, his hammers. But take an ignorant man, who knows not for what purpose each thing is, and he finds fault with all. But if he have not the skill of the workman, and have but the reasoning power of a man, what says he to himself? Not without reason are the bellows placed here: the workman knows wherefore, though I know not. In the shop he dares not to find fault with the smith, yet in the universe he dares to find fault with God. Therefore just as fire, hail, snow, ice, wind of storms, which do His word, so all things in nature, which seem to foolish persons to be made at random, simply do His word, because they are not made save by His command.

10. Then he mentions, that they may praise the Lord, mountains and hills, fruitful trees and all cedars Psalm 148:9: beasts and all cattle, creeping things, and winged fowls Psalm 148:10. Then he goes to men; kings of the earth and all people, princes and all judges of the earth Psalm 148:11: young men and maidens, old men and young, let them praise the Name of the Lord Psalm 148:12. Ended is the praise from heaven, ended is the praise from earth. For His Name only is exalted Psalm 148:13.

Let no man seek to exalt his own name. Will you be exalted? Subject yourself to Him who cannot be humbled. His confession is in earth and heaven Psalm 148:14. What is His confession? Is it the confession wherewith He confesses? No, but that whereby all things confess Him, all things cry aloud: the beauty of all things is in a manner their voice, whereby they praise God. The heaven cries out to God, You made me, not I myself. Earth cries out, You created me, not I myself. How do they cry out?

When you regard them, and findest this out, they cry out by your voice, they cry out by your regard. Regard the heavens, it is beautiful: observe the earth, it is beautiful: both together are very beautiful. He made them, He rules them, by His nod they are swayed, He orders their seasons, He renews their movements, by Himself He renews them. All these things then praise Him, whether in stillness or in motion, whether from earth below or from heaven above, whether in their old state or in their renewal.

When you see all these things, and rejoicest, and art lifted up to the Maker, and gazest on His invisible things understood by the things which are made, Romans 1:20 His confession is in earth and heaven: that is, thou confesses to Him from things on earth, thou confesses to Him from things in heaven. And since He made all things, and nought is better than He, whatsoever He made is less than He, and whatsoever in these things pleases you, is less than He. Let not then what He has made so please you, as to withdraw you from Him who made: if you love what He made, love much more Him who made.

If the things which He has made are beautiful, how much more beautiful is He who made them. And He shall exalt the horn of His people. Behold what Haggai and Zachariah prophesied. Now the horn of His people is humble in afflictions, in tribulations, in temptations, in beating of the breast; when will He exalt the horn of His people? When the Lord has come, and our Sun is risen, not the sun which is seen with the eye, and rises upon the good and the evil, Matthew 5:45 but That whereof is said, To you that hear God, the Sun of Righteousness shall rise, and healing in His wings; Malachi 4:2 and of whom the proud and wicked shall hereafter say, The light of righteousness has not shined unto us, and the sun of righteousness rose not upon us.

Wisdom 5:6 This shall be our summer. Now during the winter weather the fruits appear not on the stock; you observe, so to say, dead trees during the winter. He who cannot see truly, thinks the vine dead; perhaps there is one near it which is really dead; both are alike during winter; the one is alive, the other is dead, but both the life and death are hidden: summer advances; then the life of the one shines brightly, the death of the other is manifested: the splendour of leaves, the abundance of fruit, comes forth, the vine is clothed in outward appearance from what it has in its stock.

Therefore, brethren, now we are the same as other men: just as they are born, eat, drink, are clothed, pass their life, so also do the saints. Sometimes the very truth deceives men, and they say, Lo, he has begun to be a Christian: has he lost his headache? or, because he is a Christian, what gains he from me? O dead vine, you observe near you a vine that is bare indeed in winter, yet not dead. Summer will come, the Lord will come, our Splendour, that was hidden in the stock, and then He shall exalt the horn of His people, after the captivity wherein we live in this mortal life....

11. An hymn to all His Saints. Know ye what an hymn is? It is a song with praise of God. If you praise God and singest not, you utter no hymn: if you sing and praisest not God, you utter no hymn: if you praise anything else, which pertains not to the praise of God, although you sing and praisest, you utter no hymn. An hymn then contains these three things, song, and praise, and that of God. Praise then of God in song is called an hymn. What then means, An hymn to all His Saints? Let His Saints receive an hymn: let His Saints utter an hymn: for this is what they are to receive in the end, an everlasting hymn....

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-augustine/exposition-on-psalm-148/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net