



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: PSALM 148:1-5, 7, 9-13

¹ Hallelujah! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights. ² Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly armies. ³ Praise him, sun & moon; praise him, all you shining stars. ⁴ Praise him, highest heavens... ⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD... ⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth, all sea monsters & ocean depths... ⁹ mountains & all hills, fruit trees & all cedars, ¹⁰ wild animals & all cattle, creatures that crawl & flying birds, ¹¹ kings of the earth & all peoples, princes & all judges of the earth, ¹² young men as well as young women, old & young together. ¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD..." (PS. 148)

SUMMARY:

The church is God's Temple today, where He dwells and is worshipped. The church as Temple fits in the Bible's overall narrative arc. Eden was the initial cosmic temple for God to dwell among his creation; Revelation ends with the ultimate Temple. Creation as God's cosmic Temple implies that, not only humans, but also, all God's creatures were made to worship God. Psalm 148 reflects this theme; Revelation also portrays all creation united in songs of praise to God and the Lamb (Rev. 5:13). If the whole creation—animals, birds, fish, etc.—worships God, so should we. This realization ought to affect our appreciation of nature and our care for God's creation.

Creation Called to Worship—Psalm 148

- "The...*entire created order...[is] a cosmic Temple...in which all creation (human & non-human) are called to worship their Creator...[This idea] surfaces in 148, which...calls...heavenly & earthly creatures to praise their Creator as...a host of worshippers in the cosmic sanctuary.*" [J. Richard Middleton, *New Heaven & a New Earth: ...Biblical Eschatology*, p.]

- “Ps. 148...invit[es] all of creation & its inhabitants...to join in the praise of God. All are included; none are excluded in the call...”
- All creation, animate & inanimate, can participate in celebration of the God of creation.” [N DeClaisse-Walford, *Psalms*, p 1004]
- “Psalm 148 invites *praise from the totality of creation...Every creature & everything* are invited to praise God...Note [that] human beings are the last to enter this...total praise in Ps. 148... Human beings form simply one section of the universal chorus ... *Other creatures show forth the praise of God by being what they are* as God’s creatures. So, Israel...shows forth God’s praise by being who they are, the redeemed people of God...In this way they...*join with the vast chorus of God’s non-human creatures in the honor of God & in witness to God...Ps. 148 is a logical choice for the 1st Sunday after Christmas.*” [J. Clinton McCann Jr., 148 in R. E. Van Har (ed.) *Psalms for Preaching & Worship*, pp. 372-373]
- “Ps. 148 “ranges over the...many creatures...Genesis 1 & Ps. 104 envision...Ps. 148 is an itinerary of the whole creation...[in] the context of...temple liturgy...The creatures...do not need human mediation...They can sing before God—& be heard by God—all by themselves...God hears...nature’s song of praise...We...the Household of faith...can join in the hymn of the whole creation... along with all other creatures” [H. Paul Santmire, “*Two Voices of Nature*,” in L. E. Dahill (ed.) *Eco-Reformation*, 86, 88]
- “To recognize that all creatures praise God...is to see that *all creation exists for God’s glory, not for human use*. All creatures have their own value for God & praise God simply by being [& doing] what he has made them to be &...do. To recognize that all creatures praise God is...to [see] ourselves as fellow-creatures...Participation with other creatures in the worship...to God is the strongest *antidote to Christian anthropo-centrism*. When humans join their fellow-creatures...giving glory to their common Creator *there’s no hierarchy*...all creatures...are simply fellow-creatures expressing the theo-centricity of the world, each in their own created way, differently but in complementarity. The theme of all creation’s praise of God is prominent...in... Psalms
- ...It’s in Rev. 5:13...” [Richard Bauckham, “*Creation’s Praise of God in...Revelation*,” Biblical Theology Bulletin, V. 38, #2, p.]
- “Human inability to comprehend shouldn’t detract...from the possibilities of other-than-human creatures’ capacity to...give glory to God, even if that capacity depends on their unique created capacities of expression...Nature...*belongs to God, exists for the glory of God, even reflects the glory of God, as humans also do*” [J. J. Leese, “*Scripture in...Ecological Crisis*,” p. 154]

Bible’s Meta-narrative—God’s Temple: From Eden to Eternity

- Genesis’ “opening chapters...[describe] *God’s blueprint for the earth. God intends that the world should become His dwelling place*...This blueprint is...brought to completion [as]...the New Jerusalem envisioned in Rev. 21-22.” –T. Desmond Alexander
- “Movement from...Eden to the New Jerusalem underlies all...Scripture...The biblical meta-narrative affirms that this city is designed to be God’s dwelling place, shared with humanity...In the OT the tabernacle & temple are microcosms, illustrat[ing] God’s intention that his holy presence should fill the whole earth.” [T Desmond Alexander, *Paradise to...Promised Land*, p 311]
- “The tabernacle & Temple...as models pointing forward...are replaced in the NT by a very different kind of Temple...Anticipated by the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the *church becomes the new Temple* of God [Eph. 2:21], extending God’s presence throughout the earth. The church is a Temple both in use & under construction...The church is an important part of God’s mission...the eventual fulfillment [of which] is the New Jerusalem.” [T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 311]

- “The first chapters of Genesis & the last chapters of Revelation [are]...bookends to God’s plan...In Genesis God created all things & called them ‘good’ (Gen. 1-2) The Bible ends with... the new creation. ‘...I saw a new heaven & a new earth’ (Rev. 21:1) This new creation was anticipated in the OT, so it’s no accident...Revelation [uses]...imagery from both *the garden in Eden & the temple* in Jerusalem...The garden & the temple were God’s meeting places with humanity.” [F. Chan, *Francis Chan Coll.*, p.]
- “*Eden was a mini-temple*, a micro-cosmic dwelling place...The *New Jerusalem will be a new & better Eden.*”—Mitchell Chase

New Heaven & Earth—God’s Ultimate Garden-Temple-City (Rev. 21:1-3, 10, 22)

- “I saw a new heaven & a new earth...² I also saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God...³...I heard a loud voice from the throne: ‘Look, *God’s dwelling [Tabernacle] is with humanity*, and he will live with them...’ He... showed me the holy city, Jerusalem...I did not see a temple in it, because the *Lord God the Almighty & the Lamb are its temple* ...He showed me the river of the water of life...[&] the tree of life...” (Rev. 21:1-3, 10, 22; 22:1-2)
- “The new heavens & earth in Rev. 21:1-22:5 are...described as a temple [which]... encompasses the whole earth because of the work of Christ. At the very end of time, the true temple will come down completely from heaven & fill the whole creation...The *new creation is... an escalated Eden...Garden-Temple* because...the garden-temple [has] expanded over the whole earth.” [G. K. Beale, “...*Eden as the Garden Temple*,” *SBJ of Theology*, 22.2 (2018) p. 19]
- “The...New Jerusalem in Rev. 21-22 contains...strong associations with the Temple [of] Solomon...Its shape is...unusual...; it is a perfect cube...The proportions of the city match those of the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the Temple, the only other cube specifically mentioned in the Bible (1 Kings 6:20)...Since God dwells inside both...we...conclude that the *entire New Jerusalem is an expanded Holy of Holies...a Temple-city.*” [T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, p.]

Eden—God’s Initial Garden-Temple

1. Eden—the Holy of Holies of God’s Cosmic Temple for God’s Worship

- “The Garden of Eden is not simply a beautiful green space...to provide food...It is *sacred space* that reflects the fact that *God is dwelling there* (In Ezek. 28:13 Eden [is] the ‘garden of God’)...In Gen. 1...God was coming to dwell in the cosmos...making it sacred space...[In Gen. 2] *sacred space, the temple, [is] the Garden.*” [John H. Walton, *Lost World of Adam & Eve*,]
- “...Eden was not, strictly speaking, a garden for humanity but the garden of God (Ezek. 28:13). The Garden of Eden is not... farmland, but...an *archetypical sanctuary [temple]*, i.e., a place where God dwells & where man should worship him. Many...*features of the Garden [are]...found later [in] the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple.*...[In] Gen. 2 *Eden is the place of God’s presence or the Holy of Holies of the cosmic temple.*” [John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought & OT*, p.]
- “In the Bible the cosmos can be viewed as a Temple...The...central truth to the creation account is that this world is a place for *God’s presence*. Though all of the functions...meet...the needs of humanity the cosmic Temple is *theo-centric* [God-centered].” [John H. Walton, *Lost World of Genesis One*, pp. 83-84]

2. Genesis’ God-centered World View

- “Contrary to popular opinion, the *climactic moment* in the [Genesis] prologue is *not the creation of humanity*. Instead, creation is only seen to be complete...once God has ‘rested’ (Gen. 2:2-3). This...highly significant feature...*prioritizes divine ‘rest’ as the main goal of creation.*...This

strongly suggests that...the *ultimate purpose...of the created world is as a resting place for God, [e.,] a temple.*" [Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation Or Renewal?:...New Creation*, p. 282]

- "Rest is the main goal of creation...On the 7th day we finally discover that God has been working to achieve a rest. The *7th day is not a theological appendix*...Rather, it intimates the purpose of creation...God doesn't set up the cosmos so that only people will have a place. He also *sets up the cosmos as His temple* in which He will have" [John H. Walton, *Genesis*, p.]

Creation—God's Temple where all Creatures Worship (Psalm 148)

1. All Creatures made & called to Worship (Ps. 150:6; 145:21b cf. Ps. 65:12-13; 69:34; 96:9-13; 98:4-9; 1 Chron. 16:29b-33)

- "Let everything that breathes praise the LORD..." "Let every living thing bless His holy name forever & ever." (Ps. 150:6; 145:21b)
- "OT writers...spoke of the *creation's rejoicing* over God's care...e.g. Ps. 65:12-13: [When God waters the earth] 'The wilderness pastures overflow, & the hills are robed with joy. ¹³ The pastures are clothed with flocks & the valleys covered with grain. They [i.e. pastures, hills, valleys, & creatures (flocks) etc.] shout in triumph; indeed, they sing'." [G. W. Peterman, *Joy & Tears*, p.]
- "God instilled *within creation the desire to worship* Him...Psalm[s] shows...*all creation is capable to worship*...—the heavens... earth & all its inhabitants (animate & inanimate)...all are called...to praise the Lord." [Steven D Brooks, *Worship Quest*, 40-1]
- "Worship...*is not specific to humans*. Rather, all creatures in heaven & on earth are called to worship God...Cosmic worship...is the theme of Psalm 148...It's significant that humans are just one of many sets of creatures called to worship God...We think... *worship is unique to humans* only because we've internalized an *anthropocentric—human-centered—worldview*. In the Biblical worldview mountains & stars worship God just as much as we do...*Humans are defined not by our worship...worship is what defines creation* (all creatures are called to worship)." [J. Richard Middleton, *New Heaven & a New Earth*,]
- "We know...'creation groans'...(Rom. 8:19-21), but *does this mean that the rejoicing heavens & seas & trees sing only after Jesus comes to judge?* Some take this view, relegating this celebration to...[the] millennial kingdom on earth. Others think the verses [Ps. 148, etc.] illustrate the on-going anticipation of creation...that even today...creation [is] part of the worship chorus of God...This opens the doors wide, allowing God's created world to join us in worship. The ocean tides sing of God's power & faithfulness...The song-birds [sing] praise that God...hears." [Paul Borthwick, *Missions: God's Heart for the World*, 54]
- "The biblical picture of other-than-human creation worshipping God alongside God's people should...expand our vision...God values all creation, & all creation sings forth its gratitude in praise. Seeing creation in these terms hallows creation & [implies] it...should be tended carefully." [Jeffrey S Lamp, "...*Creation Care & the 5-fold Gospel*," A. J. Swoboda, *Blood Cries Out*, 163]

2. Not Pantheism—We don't worship Nature, that's pantheism. We (& all creatures) worship the God of Nature.

- S. Lewis writes: "Nature & God are distinct; the One [i.e., God] had made the other; the One ruled & the other obeyed. To say that God created Nature, while it brings God & nature into relation, also separates them. What makes and what is made must be two, not one...The doctrine of creation...empties Nature of divinity." [C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 77]
- "Faith in the one Transcendent God of the Bible has...de-divinized the world of nature & handed it over to [humans]...But for Christians this world is still the Creator's, to whom we...are accountable." [W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theo.*, Vol. 2, pp. 204-5]

3. Humans & Animals *not* fundamentally different in Constitution—both have 'souls' & 'spirits' (Eccl. 3:19-21)

- a. "For what happens to...man & what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the *same breath*, & man has no advantage over the beasts...Who knows whether the *spirit of man* goes

upward & the *spirit of the beast* goes down into the earth? (Eccl. 3:19, 21 ESV. [Gen. 2:7 cf. Ps. 104:29-30 where 'God's breath animates all living things' (JPS)])

- b. In "Eccl. 3:19–21...human beings have one breath [*ruach*: breath/spirit], just like animals, & they die just like animals...In line with...Eccl. 3:19-20, [verse] 21 presents a rhetorical question, *opposing the view* that there is a different fate for humans. The question 'who knows...' should be answered 'nobody knows!'" [Ed Noort, "... 2:7..." in *Dust... & Breath of Life...* pp. 13-14]
 - c. "Animals are 'brought forth' from the earth, & humans are likewise shaped...by the hand of God from the... soil...Animals are described as 'living souls' or 'living beings' (Heb., *nephesh*) [Animals: Gen 1:20–24; 2:19...; humans: Gen 2:7; 9:5]. The exact same term is used in Genesis to describe human beings...*making human-animal ontological continuity explicit*...Other Hebrew biblical terminology reflects this unity...as well...E.g., the phrase 'spirit of life' (Heb., *ruach hayyim*) can indicate both animals & humans, as can the word 'flesh' (Heb., *basar*)...[Plus] 'all flesh' (Heb. *kol basar*) can mean 'all living creatures, animal as well as human' [e.g. Gen. 6:17; 7:21-23]." [Joshua M. Moritz, "Animals & the Image of God in the Bible," *Dialog*, Vol. 48, #2, p. 134]
 - d. "The OT...does not view the life principle as the exclusive possession of humans. We [humans]...are 'living souls.' But the animals are also (e.g. Gen. 1:30)...Genesis reports God...saying: 'I'm bringing...floodwaters on the earth to destroy every creature...with the breath (*ruach*) of life in it. Everything on earth will perish' (Gen. 6:17). Hence, not only *nephesh* ['soul'], but also *ruach* ['spirit'/breath] is connected with animals, as well as humankind." [Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, p 161]
 - e. "How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep..." (Mt. 12:12) "Jesus'...teaching regarding humans & animals assumes *an unbroken continuum between the two* that allows Jesus to compare them. *Humans, according to Jesus are not set on a different ontological plane from animals. The difference is one of degree rather than kind.*" [Joshua M. Moritz, "Animals & the Image of God in the Bible," *Dialog*, Vol. 48, #2, p. 140]
4. Humans' Unique Role/Status/Office—God's Image-Bearers (Gen. 1:26-28)

- a. "Only humans are created in the divine image...[Scripture] links the image of God to the special role that humans are to exercise within creation [Gen. 1:27-28; 2:15-17]...Humans are created with a special status... with the task of being imagebearers. The terms 'image' & 'likeness' carry the sense of 'representation'...The 'image of God' points *more to our purpose than to the nature of our being* [our constitution]." [Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 174-175]
- b. "Image bearers have a job...[it's] a vocation or an office rather than a term that designates a kind of object... If...'image of God'...denotes a particular role...then [it's] a matter of function...This is...in contra-distinction to classic views...N. T. Wright...[asserts this] 'rules out...[the] puzzle as to what aspect of humanity might be... the divine 'image'...The picture is vocational...' [says] Wright..." [JAMES T. TURNER, JR., "Temple Theology, Holistic Eschatology, &...*Imago Dei*," *Theologica* (2018) p. 105]
- c. "As God's blessing of humans, *subduing & having dominion are...not inherent characteristics of humankind...* but rather the manner by which humans, created in the image of God, may participate in God's creative activity through their own work... Genesis 1 expresses a theo-centric view...Being in the image of God entails...human subordination to & dependence on God." [R. A. Simkins, "Bible, Religion & the Environment," in *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Anthropology*, pp. 147-8]
- d. "There's...a virtual consensus among OT scholars concerning the meaning of the *imago Dei* [God's image] in Genesis...which sees the image of God as *the royal function or office of human beings* as God's representatives & agents in the world, given authorized power to share in God's rule over the earth's resources & creatures." [J. Richard Middleton, "Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context," *Christian Scholars Review*, Vol. 24.1 (1994) pp. 11-12]

5. Human Distinctives—

- Humans *not* the sole possessors of a 'spirit,' *not* the only creatures capable of worshiping God
- But Humans are 'God's image' (a role/function/office, not a component) (Gen. 1:26-28)
- God incarnated as a human (not any other creature) "God sent forth his Son, *born of woman...*" (Gal. 4:4)
 - God's revelation (Scripture) & gospel for humans (not other creatures) "*The Bible does give a great deal of attention to humans; it is...a human text produced for & about humans.* Nevertheless, humans in the Bible are...embedded in the larger context of creation & especially in their relationship to God." [R. Simkins, *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Anthropology*, p. 147] ØYet: The cosmic temple is for creation's worship of God. God values all creatures & their worship of Him (so should we).

- Yet: Humans—God’s image-bearers—are responsible for creation—do we help creatures praise or make them groan (Rm. 8:22)?
 - “The theme of the earth *rejoicing* toward the Creator and mourning [*groaning*], typically in response to human wrongdoing, is frequent in the Psalms & Prophets...& appears in the NT as well (Rm. 8:21-3).” [J. J. Leese, *Current Trends in NT Study*, 31]
 - Let’s “consider how our cavalier treatment of God’s good creation, our careless...liv[ing]...& our diminishment of the abundance & diversity of life have...made us unfaithful stewards [&] hindered our witness to the glory of God & Christ.” –Douglas Moo

6. Creation’s Eternal Worship (Rev. 4:6-8; 5:13-14)

- “Four living creatures...were around the throne on each side. ⁷ The 1st living creature was like a lion; the 2nd...was like an ox; the 3rd...had a face like a man; & the 4th...was like a flying eagle. ⁸ Each of the 4 living creatures had 6 wings...Day & night they never stop, saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God, the Almighty, who was, who is, & who is to come.’” (Rev. 4:6-8)
- “I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, & everything in them say, ‘Blessing & honor & glory & power be to the One seated on the throne, & to the Lamb, forever & ever!’ ¹⁴ The 4 living creatures said, ‘Amen’...” (Rev. 5:13-14)
- “This is...a vision...of the *heavenly dimension of present reality*...[Rev.] 4 & 5...are a vision of the throne room...We are perhaps surprised that the *beginning of worship is that of the animal, rather than the human, creation*. The 4 living creatures, the lion, the ox, the one with a human face, & the eagle...praise God ceaselessly with the Trisagion: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God the Almighty...’ Then, in the context of this *praise from all creation*, the 24 elders...fall down & declare that God is worthy of this worship...[as] the powerful creator of all.” [N. T. Wright, “... *Recovering Biblical Worship*,” *Studia Liturgica*, 2002, p.]
- “Rev. 4:6b-8 portrays the 4 living creatures as the central worshippers in creation, who, as heavenly representatives of the animate creatures of earth [birds, domestic & wild animals, humans], unceasingly give to God the praise that all creation owes Him...Rev. 5 describes all creatures worshipping God [Rev. 5:13]...Even amongst the worshippers human beings are not preeminent. The 4 living creatures who lead the worship of the whole of creation are not portrayed as anthropomorphic [humanlike] beings...Only the 3rd...creature has a human face.” [Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*,]
- “The 4 living creatures before the heavenly throne (Rev. 4:6ff) depict the created order offering... united...worship before the throne...Only 1 of the 4 living creatures has a human face (Rev. 4:7), indicating that the worship offered by...[humanity] is merely 1 facet of the totality of worship offered to God by the whole of creation.” [Simon P. Woodman, “*Can...Revelation be a Gospel...?*” in M. J. M. Coomber (ed.) *Bible & Justice*, 187]
- “Rev. 5:13 is actually a proleptic vision [i.e., a preview] of the worship offered in the New Jerusalem.” –Simon P. Woodman

QUESTIONS: Please read Psalm 148:1-5, 7, 9-13. (If you have more time read the whole Psalm)

1. What are the different categories which are called upon to “praise the Lord”? [Think about heavenly vs. earthly, living vs. non-living (rocks, etc.), plant vs. animal, etc. Even within these categories what are the sub-categories/examples? Among humans what are the various sub-categories/examples?]
2. What are the reasons suggested by the Psalm for different categories to praise the Lord?
3. Other Psalms also call on creation to praise (thank, worship) God. Have different group members read some of the following: Psalm 65:12-13; 69:34; 96:9-13; 98:4-9; 1 Chron. 16:29b-33. What categories are called to worship? According to the Psalm, why should they worship God?
4. Some people assert that “only humans have a ‘spirit,’ so only humans can worship God.”
 - a. Do you agree or disagree with the statement above? (Why or why not?)
 - b. What does Psalm 148 (& the references above) suggest concerning this issue?

- c. Read Rev. 5:13-14; what does this suggest about this issue?
- 5. Read Rom. 8:20-24. Here Paul says that “creation groans under the bondage of corruption” (Rom. 8:22-22).
 - a. Does this mean that today creation/the creatures can’t worship, they can only “groan”? (Why or why not?)
 - b. Or do they both “groan” & worship/praise? (If so, what might cause them to ‘groan’ less & worship more?)
 - c. Rom 8:23 says that we also “groan;” does this mean we can’t worship? Or do we both ‘groan’ & worship?
- 6. We humans can praise God with prayer & song using our (human) voice & words. Thinking about animals, birds, fish, etc.—for them, what (do you think) constitutes worship/praise of God?