

A dramatic landscape photograph featuring a vast, flat grassy field in the foreground. The sky is filled with dark, heavy storm clouds, and a bright, jagged lightning bolt strikes down from the center of the cloud mass. The overall mood is powerful and awe-inspiring.

PSALMS: THE PRAYER BOOK OF JESUS

Session 5: The Nature Psalms

PSALM 19:1-6, *Cæli enarrant*

The heavens declare the glory of God, *

and the firmament shows his handiwork.

One day speaks to another, *

and one night gives knowledge to another.

There is neither speech nor language, *

and their voices are not heard;

But their sound has gone out into all lands, *

and their words to the ends of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun, *

**which comes forth as a bridegroom out of his
chamber,**

and rejoices like a strong man to run his course.

It goes forth from the uttermost part of the
heavens, and runs about to the end of it again, *

and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

THE NATURE PSALMS

- Where do you feel most connected to God? Where do you go when you want to remind yourself of his presence?
 - “I feel God in the sky, in the woods, in the sea. It is through His creation that my heart is most often lifted to Him in prayer and praise.” (C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*)
 - “The whole world is charged with the glory of God and I feel fire and music under my feet. Creation itself becomes a vast cathedral where everything sings His praise.” (Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*)
- Nature constantly reminds us of our smallness and God’s greatness and points us to him.

THE NATURE PSALMS

“If we pay attention, we shall find everywhere that the creation cries aloud of the Creator. The heavens, the sun, the earth, the sea—all are like voices proclaiming God to us.”

– St. John Chrysostom

“The beauty of creation is, if you like, God’s language of welcome, God’s way of reminding us that the world is not an accident, that it is charged with His presence and meant to draw us back to Him.”

– N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*

PSALM 29, *Afferte Domino*

Ascribe unto the Lord, O you mighty, *

ascribe unto the Lord worship and strength.

Give the Lord the honor due unto his Name; *

worship the Lord with holy worship.

It is the Lord that commands the waters; *

it is the glorious God that makes the thunder.

It is the Lord that rules the sea; the voice of the Lord

is mighty in its working; *

the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice.

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees; *

indeed, the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

He makes them also to skip like a calf, *

Lebanon also, and Sirion, like a young ox.

The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire; the voice
of the Lord shakes the wilderness; *

indeed, the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the Lord makes the deer to bring forth young,
and strips the forests bare; *

in his temple all cry, "Glory."

The Lord sits above the floodwaters, *

and the Lord remains King for ever.

The Lord shall give strength to his people; *

the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

THE NATURE PSALMS

- Creation itself not only points us to praising God, but it praises God itself, as Psalm 19:1 points out.
- When told to silence his followers, Jesus even replies to the Jewish leaders, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40).

THE NATURE PSALMS

“All of creation speaks, yet without a tongue. The heavens, the earth, the seas — all proclaim the praise of their Maker.”

– Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Psalms*

“Creation is not mute. Mountains and oceans, trees and fields are the choir of God, singing praise whether we listen or not.”

– Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*

PSALM 148, *Laudate Dominum*

Praise the Lord. O praise the Lord of heaven; *

praise him in the heights.

Praise him, all you angels of his; *

praise him, all his host.

Praise him, sun and moon; *

praise him, all you stars of light.

Praise him, all you highest heavens, *

and you waters that are above the heavens.

Let them praise the Name of the Lord, *

for he spoke the word, and they were made; he commanded,

and they were created.

He has made them stand fast for ever and ever; *

he has given them a law which shall not be broken.

Praise the Lord upon earth, *

you sea monsters and all deeps;

Fire and hail, snow and fog, *

wind and storm, fulfilling his word;

Mountains and all hills, *

fruitful trees and all cedars;

Beasts and all cattle, *

creeping things and birds of the air;

Kings of the earth and all peoples, *

princes and all rulers of the world;

Young men and maidens, *

old men and children together.

Let them praise the Name of the Lord, *

for his Name only is excellent, and his praise

above heaven and earth.

He shall exalt the horn of his people; all his faithful

shall praise him, *

the children of Israel, the people who are near him.

Praise the Lord.

THE NATURE PSALMS

- Since the beginning, when God walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam, humans have found nature a particularly special place for connection with God.
- In Genesis 1:1, we are told that God created the world, and in John 1:3, we are told that it is through the Word, Jesus himself, that the world was created.
- In Genesis 1, God made us custodians of the natural world (Genesis 1:28).
- In Genesis 2, God places Adam in a Garden to till and keep it (Genesis 2:15).
- In Genesis 3, God curses the ground and makes our toil of it more difficult because of Adam and Eve's sin (Genesis 3:17-18).

THE NATURE PSALMS

- Psalm 29, the “Thunderstorm Psalm,” is one of five psalms in the Psalter that we consider “Nature Poems” (These are Psalms 8, 19, 29, 104, and 148).
- While many psalms use nature images, these nature poems feature God’s creation as their main subject.
- In nature poetry:
 - The poet praises nature for its beauty, power, and provision.
 - The poet describes nature in evocative word pictures, awakening our own experiences of nature.
 - The poet personifies aspects of nature to show a kinship between people and nature.

THE NATURE PSALMS

- The overall logic that governs nature psalms is the twofold purpose of awakening and expressing our sense of the glory of
 - Nature
 - The God of Nature
- Much of what we find in the nature psalms falls into place if we are aware of the twofold context of what the poets wrote:
 - They belonged to a nation of farmers in which nearly everyone lived close to the soil
 - They had a thoroughgoing doctrine of creation that asserted that God had made everything that exists.

PSALM 8, *Domine, Dominus noster*

O Lord our Governor, how excellent is your Name
in all the world; *

you have set your glory above the heavens!
Out of the mouth of babes and infants you have ordained
strength, because of your enemies, *
that you might still the enemy and the avenger.
When I consider your heavens, even the works of your
fingers, *

the moon and the stars, which you have ordained,
What is man, that you are mindful of him, *
the son of man, that you visit him?
You made him little lower than the angels, *
to crown him with glory and honor.

You made him to have dominion over the works of your
hands, *
and you have put all things in subjection under his feet:
All sheep and oxen, *
even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, *
and whatsoever walks through the paths of the seas.
O Lord our Governor, *
how excellent is your Name in all the world!

THE NATURE PSALMS

- Psalm 8 begins proclaiming God's majesty:
 - "O Lord our Governor, how excellent is your Name in all the world."
- This is the way ancient Israel would have addressed a king.
- Psalm 8 shows us that, even though humans are incredibly small things in the vast creation, they are crowned with God-like glory (Psalm 8:5).
 - This is also, by use of the phrase "Son of Man" also a picture of Christ taking on human flesh, becoming "a little lower than the angels," to be crowned "with glory and honor."
- But, in the nature psalms, the psalmist reminds us not only of our royal identity but also of our royal responsibility: to exercise dominion over the works of God's creation in a way that reflects God's own dominion over it.

THE NATURE PSALMS

“We are not to despise the creation, but to honor it. For the earth belongs to God, and our care for it is one way in which we return to Him the worship due His name.”

– John Stott, *The Birds Our Friends*

“When human beings care for creation, they are not just managing resources; they are singing a hymn of praise with their actions, declaring that the Creator is wise and good.”

– N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*

“Our mission includes caring for the earth, because the earth is the Lord’s. To treat creation with reverence is an act of obedience and worship to its Maker.”

– Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God*

THE NATURE PSALMS

- The language of Psalm 8:6-8 resembles the language of Genesis 1 and 2: God makes human beings rulers of “all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.”
- Just as kings are to rule God’s people lovingly, reflecting his rule, humans are to rule creation lovingly, as God rules it.
- We can succeed at this work only because we are confident that Christ himself has faithfully performed this human vocation in obedience to his Father, just as he fulfilled the creation in the first place, doing perfectly (as in all things) what we have failed to do.
- In Christ, we also look to the ultimate fulfillment: the new Creation, a new City that mirrors but exceeds the Garden of Eden. Just as he made this world, he is “making all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

THE NATURE PSALMS

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”

... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

Rev. 21:1-5, 22:1-2 (NRSV)