

The Great Creator

Psalm 104

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Psalm 104 opens with the same words that open and close Psalm 103: "Bless/Praise the LORD, my soul." These two psalms are the only ones that include that exhortation. These two songs go together. Psalm 103 is about all God's blessings, God's character of compassion, the heart of the salvation God offers. Psalm 104 is about all that God has created. It's a prayer to and a celebration of God the great creator, the "maker of heaven and earth." In it we can see the goodness of creation, including ourselves.

The LORD God is the great creator who rules his creation. There's no hint in the Bible that God made the universe then left it to run by itself without any guidance or help from God. God remains active in creation. God continues to create. Without the LORD's presence and activity, there would be no life and creation would stop existing.

Psalm 104 is packed with images and affirmations of what God makes. We see light, land, water, animals, birds, grass, plants, trees, the moon and sun, night and day, seasons, creatures large and small. All of it is sustained by the LORD's breath/spirit. God's glory fills it all. It all displays God's wisdom and God's rule. God delights and rejoices in what God has made. And that calls us to rejoice and praise the LORD.

The psalm opens with the singer telling himself—or herself—to praise the LORD. It ends with a call for everyone to praise the LORD. The last line of the psalm says, "Praise the LORD." The word there is *hallelujah*. This is the first time it appears in the Psalms. The KJV says, "Praise ye the LORD." Hallelujah is a call, an exhortation to many people to praise Yahweh. It literally means "you all praise the LORD." We often use this call to praise as an expression of praise.

Who is this God we praise? God is the LORD, the creator and ruler of heaven and earth. This psalm celebrates God as creator and helps us see the Creator's greatness. The psalm is packed full of images and ideas. I'm going to lift up a few themes that show God's greatness as Creator. We see

the Creator's greatness in creation's goodness, in creation's diversity, in wonder and delight, in wisdom.

We see the Creator's greatness in creation's goodness. The psalmists knew about sin and terror and violence and war. Still, in the face of all that, they affirmed the original, essential, and ultimate goodness of the world God made. Psalm 104 draws on Genesis 1 and its celebration of creation. At each stage of creation in Genesis 1, the LORD declares that what he made is good, even very good. In the psalm, we see that goodness in the way creation is ordered. The different parts of creation work together, sustain and help each other. God puts things in place. There are seasons and days. The various creatures belong to God.

I'd like for us to be *biblical environmentalists*. That means we recognize God as the creator and sustainer of the environment and everything that lives in it. And we care for it because it's God's good creation and because we're part of God's good creation. Our life as physical beings is supposed to show God's glory. We're not just spirits trapped in a material realm for a time. We are whole people, spirit and body, made by God to be part of this world, this physical universe that God intends to be full of his glory. Because humans were made in God's image, we have a special responsibility to help care for the rest of creation. We want to see and show God's goodness in all things God has made.

There's a hymn that we usually associate with children, but it helps us all celebrate all of creation as coming from the LORD God.

All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful: the Lord God made them all.

(Cecil Francis Alexander, 1848, *The United Methodist Hymnal*
#147)

The great God made this good creation, so creation's goodness shows the Creator's greatness.

We also see the Creator's greatness in creation's diversity. That little hymn seems to draw on Psalm 104, and others, as it describes many of God's creatures. The psalm shows the rich diversity of what God has made.

Light itself is like God's garment. The sky is like the tent he pitches. Clouds are God's chariot; wind and lightning are his servants and messengers. Water fills oceans, rivers, and streams as well as raining down from the sky. Wild donkeys drink it and birds nest near it. Grass grows for cattle. God gives plants for people to cultivate. Trees belong to God. There's the moon to mark seasons and the sun to give light each day. Animals and people live by its rhythm. Creatures of the sea have their place. God provides for all that God has made

Rich Mullins wrote a great song that describes many of the things we find in creation. It celebrates the diversity and wonder of what God has made.

Down at Johnson's Creek the trees grow tall
Like a man who feeds his soul on your word
And I can look in the water, I can see the stars fall
Hear the fires crackle and the crickets chirp
And there are bluffs on the banks of the Cumberland
Where I can see the sun rise from a world away
And I can see the marvelous things that you have done
In the beautiful world that you have made

And in the winter it's white, in the summer it's green
And in the fall it's orange and red and gold
Then it comes alive in the rites of spring
When the rivers thaw and the flowers unfold
And there are beads of dew on a spider's web
And there are motes of dust in these beams of light
We who are bone and spittle and muscle and sweat
We live together in a world where it's good to be alive

'Cause it flutters and floats, it falls and it climbs
It spins and sputters and spurts
And you filled this world with wonders 'round every turn
And it buzzes and beeps, it shimmies and shines

It rattles and patters and purrs
And you filled this world with wonders
And I'm filled with the wonder of your world

If there's a better world and a brighter day
Even brighter than the one we're in
We'd all be fools to think that it could be made
By the wills and the hands of foolish men

So Lord to you we give our deepest praise
And to you we sing our loudest songs
And while we live in the world that you have made
We hear it whisper of a world, of a world that is to come

'Cause it flutters and floats, it falls and it climbs
It spins and sputters and spurts
And you filled this world with wonders 'round every turn
And it buzzes and beeps, it shimmies and shines
It rattles and patters and purrs
And you filled this world with wonders
And I'm filled with the wonder of your world

(Rich Mullins, "With the Wonder," on the album *Winds of Heaven, Stuff of Earth*, 1988;

<http://kidbrothers.net/wohsoe.html#wtw>)

That sense of wonder and delight is another way we see God's greatness in creation. We don't have to be scientists to appreciate the complexity and wonder of the world—though it probably helps. But anyone can be moved by the beauty of a sunset. In about a week, there'll be a total solar eclipse that will move across North America. Some people will travel hours to see it. Some of us will be content to experience the partial eclipse. It's natural and easily explained, but there's still something wondrous about it. There's an essay by Annie Dillard called "Total Eclipse" where she describes seeing an eclipse in 1979. I remember that one. I was in class in

high school and the sky turned dark. Dillard describes the amazement and fear and wonder of seeing the sun as just a pale ring of light with the dark lens cap of the moon in front of it

[\(https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/08/annie-dillards-total-eclipse/536148/\)](https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/08/annie-dillards-total-eclipse/536148/).

Think of the beautiful scenes in nature that you've experienced. Don't they fill us with amazement, with wonder, with delight? The psalm talks about the land being satisfied with the fruit of God's work (verse 13). It says, "He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that satisfies their hearts" (14-15).

It declares, "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works" (31). What do you think about God rejoicing in and delighting in what he has made? Do you think God enjoys creating? I like this quote from the British writer G. K. Chesterton:

Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, "Do it again"; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun; and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. (*Orthodoxy*; <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/19966-because-children-have-abounding-vitality-because-they-are-in-spirit>)

This wonder and delight appear when the psalm tells about the large and small sea creatures that are beyond number. Talking about the vast and spacious sea and what's in it, verse 26 says, "There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there."

Leviathan is mentioned several times in Scripture. It also appears in other ancient Near Eastern literature. It was a fearsome sea creature, the monster of chaos. In some stories, the gods had to defeat Leviathan to create the world. Often in the Bible, the LORD God defeats and tames this chaos monster. But in this psalm, the LORD made Leviathan to play in the ocean. Not only that, but the commentaries tell us that the Hebrew here indicates that God plays with Leviathan. What people saw as the terrifying sea monster of chaos is just God's pet, something God delights in playing with. "This image of God playing with the great sea monster offers comfort for all those who feel the world around them is chaotic and unruly" (Jerome Creach,

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1686).

Can we share God's delight and joy in all that God has made? That's a big part of what praise and worship are about.

One more way we see God's greatness in creation is in creation's wisdom—or, God's wisdom in making it. "How many are your works, LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (24).

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified and speaks. In one place she says, "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be" (8:22-23). Of course, that refers to Genesis 1 and the very first word of Scripture: "in the beginning." The apostle Paul follows this line of thinking in Colossians. He writes poetically, almost like a Hebrew psalm, about Jesus the Messiah. All things are created in, through, and for the Messiah. All things are to be redeemed in, through, and for the Messiah.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Col 1:15-20)

Jesus is the beginning. He's the wisdom of God in the flesh. By his incarnation, becoming human, he shows the goodness of the physical world and the body. Through Jesus' bodily resurrection God affirms his continued care for the world God made.

Everything that Israel's scriptures had said about "beginning" and "wisdom" has come rushing together in Jesus himself. The resurrection has gloriously reaffirmed the goodness and God-givenness of the creation ... and has restated God's intention to fill it all to overflowing with his own love and life and glory. Thus, though creation as it now stands must go through the valley of the shadow of death, God will bring it to new life by his Spirit, and this will lead to the great prayer that the glory of YHWH may last forever, that YHWH may rejoice in his works. (N. T. Wright, *The Case for the Psalms* 132-33)

The goodness and diversity and wonder and wisdom we see in creation point to new creation. God has an enduring purpose for all he has made. We live now in the time when God is working to redeem us. Someday, redemption will be complete, creation will be renewed and restored to God's intention. Through faith in Jesus, we will have a place in God's new creation and live forever in the glory and love of God, praising the LORD for all his good works.

Hear the affirmation that you are part of God's good creation, that God delights in you. Turn from the stuff that diminishes life and keeps us from experiencing the goodness God intends. Receive forgiveness and redemption that Jesus makes available. Join God in delighting and caring for all that God has made. Through the Holy Spirit, who keeps creating and

giving life and who renews the face of the earth, live in hope of the final fulfillment of God's purpose in the new heaven and new earth.