

Dranesville UMC, Sunday, May 25, 2025
All Things New

Psalm 148

1 Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.

2 Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

3 Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.

4 Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

5 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for at his command they were created,

6 and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

7 Praise the Lord from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

8 lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,

9 you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

10 wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,

11 kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,

12 young men and women,
old men and children.

13 Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

14 And he has raised up for his people a horn,
the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the Lord.

Rev 21:1-6

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

6 He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

Did you read about James Carver, who served 36 years in prison even though he didn’t commit the crime? He was sent to jail in 1989 for an arson that killed 15 people. Last year, after his attorney submitted new scientific evidence, and the judge found the old evidence to be untrustworthy, he was declared innocent. Now 61, Mr. Carver has difficulty standing, requires a wheelchair to get around, and suffers from the effects of brain tumor surgery. He also experiences tremors, is deaf in one ear, and struggles to hear with the other. While he was in prison, his mother, father, and older brother passed away. He and his wife divorced in 1991, even though she always believed he was innocent. He couldn’t see his daughter, except in the visitation room. He said, “They took my life away for nothing. I’ve always said that I’m not the person that was involved in [the fire], and I meant it.”

Whenever I hear stories like this, I’m heartbroken. How can this be? Also, do stories like this reflect the lives of believers who might be misunderstanding their faith? Are we not living the life God wants us to live simply because we don’t fully understand our salvation?

Salvation, according to N.T. Wright, is restoring a full relationship with God and enjoying the whole divine presence in our lives. That was the original intent from the beginning, he contends. In other words, we live in the resurrection life of Christ today.

Matthew 28:20: “...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

2 Corinthians 13:5: “...Do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?”

The question I’ve been wrestling with for the last few years is, “How do we live in the resurrection today?” I don’t want us to miss out. Our passage gives us a helpful perspective.

First, we must remember we’re married to Christ. In our passage, the city of Jerusalem is like a bride. Along this line, the Bible declares that God’s people are the bride.

Here’s an astonishing aspect of marriage, shared in Genesis 2:24: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

The Hebrew word for *united* is *dabak*, which means to cleave, be stuck together, or be glued together.

This passage may not apply to every marriage, but it describes our relationship with Christ. We're glued together—cleaved unto Christ. Where I go, He goes. Where I am, He is. But like many couples, we're not always on the same page. Nevertheless, through time, shared history, mutual respect, and sacrifice, the relationship transforms. The two become one.

I've seen many relationships where one person wants it more than the other. You've probably noticed those couples around you. What happens? One person seems to be doing all the heavy lifting. You wonder how it's going to end.

With Christ, we have this imbalance in our relationship. However, we know how this will end. It ends with the new Jerusalem coming down to earth. The Book of Revelation describes the process of building the Kingdom of God on earth, brick by brick. We're cleaved unto the resurrected Jesus. Through the process, we become new.

Related to it, the second point is: all things will be made new. With Christ, things are not mended, improved, or developed. They're made new. How many of us have things that could be better? With Christ, they're not just fixed, altered, or changed. They're made new.

Biologically, did you know we're being renewed? For example, in humans, skin cells are replaced roughly every month. Red blood cells have a lifespan of about four months. Liver cells regenerate within 1–3 years. Skeletal cells take about 10 years to fully renew. About 1% of our body is renewed every day. I've been ministering here for about four years now. I could say, physically, I'm a completely different person. Also, theologically and spiritually, I'm vastly different from who I was four years ago. In Christ, through Christ, we're constantly being made new!

Third, there will no longer be any sea. The sea represents trouble. The sea is chaotic. The sea is full of dangerous creatures. The sea represents all that ails us, separates us, and makes us doubt God's presence in our world. With union in Christ, there will no longer be any troubled waters. This too shall pass. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

When we read Psalm 148, we should be astonished. The things that we thought were enemies of God—the troubles and problems that torment us—are under the control of God. Moreover, they praise and give glory to God.

Verse 7 says: *"Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths."*

The Hebrew word for *great sea creature* is *Tanin*, which means the great serpent. The Hebrew word for *ocean depths* is *Tehom*, the same word that appears in Genesis 1:2: *"The Spirit of the Lord was hovering over the surface of the deep."* Both of these words in the Hebrew Bible stood for wickedness, evil, and trouble.

But here, they praise the Lord. Not only that, look at the next verse:

Verse 8: *"Lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding."*

These uncontrollable elements of weather can wreak havoc in our world. They're deemed catastrophic. However, here, they're doing God's bidding. They are under God's control.

I read leadership books. Uniformly, all of them teach that problems are doors to solutions. Troubles are portals to a brand-new future. Great leaders and managers utilize problems to achieve tremendous success. When we are cleaved together with the greatest leader, the sea is no more.

Last point—when we're married, glued together with Christ, His love, grace, mercy, compassion, and empathy flow into our lives. Our passage states that God will wipe away all tears. When we're in trouble and when we dwell in sorrow, because we're one with Christ, we experience God's sympathy, empathy, love, comfort, and care.

Many of you have shared with me what your parents were like. Many of them were like mine. I grew up in a family with virtually no empathy. On a scale of one to ten in terms of empathy, I would say our family was negative seven. I could never show my emotions. "Just suck it up," they said. I understand why—because they grew up under harsh Japanese occupation, and on top of that, they experienced the brutal Korean War, and they also became immigrants. They walked 10 kilometers each way, uphill, in snowstorms every time they went to school. Compared to their upbringing, they thought I had it too easy. No sympathy in my house.

But the reason I was drawn to the Lord is His compassion. He sits with us in our sorrow, in our pain, in our discouraged state. God wipes away all tears from our lives. This is the resurrected presence of Jesus. Furthermore, God helps us to be compassionate. We wipe away the tears of those who grieve. We comfort those in pain. We bring loving justice to those who have been wronged—like James Carver.

Let's turn to Psalm 148. It reminds us that the greatest experience of God's presence comes through praise. When we praise, we draw near to God. When we draw near to God, we praise. The ancients testified to this. They testify that even though they suffered through many invasions, trials, and even exile, by praising the Lord through all situations, they experienced the presence of God in their lives.

They also realized they're not alone in their praise and worship of God. There is a chorus of praise already going on in the universe—the angels, the stars, the moon, the sun, the planets, the supernovas in space. The sea creatures, animals both big and small, insects, flowers, plants, trees, mountains, rivers—all of Earth is in the midst of ongoing praise to God.

Mr. Carver wants to regain his life. I hope and pray he does. For us, let's not miss out on this incredible life with the resurrected Lord. Let's keep worshiping, praising, and encouraging one another in the Lord. We'll be renewed. Our troubles will diminish. The comfort of the Lord will be with us through all troubles and sorrow. We're cleaved unto Christ. Let's remember the grace, the love, and the compassion God has already poured out in our lives. All things are made new in His presence. Amen.

With kind regards,

Keith Lee

Pastor at www.dranesvilleumc.org

703-430-3137