

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Lecture 8

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This is Dr. Bruce Waltke in his teaching on the book of Psalms. This is session number 8, Hymns, Theology, hesed, Creation, Kingship, and Temple.

And we've been reflecting on the form of a psalm called a hymn. We noticed its motifs and its motifs are an introductory call to praise. That's the match I say to ignite the fire. Then we have the cause for praise, and that's the fuel that furnishes the fire.

Then we have a renewed call to praise. I've been reflecting on these motifs. So, we reflected on the call to praise.

We reflected on the whole imperative mood that God was telling us to praise him. How do we understand that? Because we would never do that with a human being. We would look down on a human being.

We suggested that we say, it because it is fitting and right, and we are dead if we don't. It's totally fitting and appropriate. It's for our good.

To praise what is praiseworthy and not to praise it is to be like tone-deaf. I said that's what Louis said, not to hear. And then we reflected on who actually does the praising.

It's all the people of God and political choirs and so forth. Before that, we reflected on the enthusiasm with music and clapping and singing and it's not lukewarm. It's fervent praise that pleases God.

Then the performance, who does it? And we ended by saying, one of the points we've made is he doesn't want praise from sinners. It's an abomination to him. And yet I hear a lot of that today.

I hope I'm not being judgmental. I don't intend to be judgmental. I'm just saying what I see in the newspapers and whatnot.

Then we were looking at the cause for praise and we jumped into the theology of praise. We noted that this is a unique way of learning theology. We're learning it in a doxological context, which is appropriate.

Namely, we're learning it from people who are praising God. As they're praising God, they are celebrating his person and his works. Their words to God of praise are coming back to us in the word of God, teaching us theology.

So we are learning about God's theology through the praises of his people to God, not through a Moses or not through a prophet, not through a sage, but we're learning it through the people of God who are pious and honest. They are celebrating God and their words to God become God's word to us. So, in fact, they become the inspired word of God to us in these words of praise.

Then we discussed his, and from there we began talking about his attributes and we divided that into his incommunicable, those in which we cannot share, and his communicable attributes. His incommunicable attributes in which we do not share included, first of all, his aseity. We talked about his aseity.

He is of himself. He derives from no one and everything derives from him. Therefore, our lives derive from him.

Everything about us is derivative and we are dependent upon him. This one who has given us this great life is worthy of our praise, his aseity. We talked about his communicable attributes of his eternal.

As aseity, I made the point, something is, something. You know, Elaine and I have our liturgy every morning and we say in the invocation, give thanks to God and Lord open our lips, and so forth. Then give thanks to God and glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and will be evermore.

That's part of our morning liturgy. In addition to the confession of sin, I talked about the other day. And so God is, in contrast to the materialist that says matter is.

We said matter is, the Bible teaches God created everything and that matter itself reflects the creator because it's so finely tuned. It's full of very precise laws. I'll come to this in Psalm 8. Einstein, as an atheist said, that what's incomprehensible is that it's comprehensible.

In other words, his logical, brilliant mind could understand the laws by which it worked. So, if it just is, it's incomprehensible how these laws, this intelligence came to be, if there isn't an intelligent being. It's a profound statement.

It's incomprehensible how it can be comprehensible. It has built into it. Paul will say, the creation shows his eternal nature and his eternal power.

You could see it. And he says you have to be blind not to see it. Then God will not judge you for not praising you, but he will withdraw from you.

His presence is gone from you. He will hand you over to what you are naturally, which is an adulterer and a homosexual. He'll just hand you over to your sin.

He withdraws his hand from us and we enter into the realm of death. So, then we were dealing with his communicable attributes on page 65. And we said they were found there at basically these major attributes are found in connection with the golden calf, that horrible sin of turning the glory of God and worshiping a grass-eating, defecating bull.

Incredible. And God has moral indignation and he's filled with wrath and wants to rid himself of these people. And Moses says, go with us.

I can't go on without you. Show me your glory. And the reason he can go on is because his attributes are also merciful, gracious, long-suffering, unending love, and total fidelity.

And those attributes provide for the grace of the sacrificial system, the grace of Jesus Christ so that his grace is greater than all of our sins. And though we commit adultery or whatever else we may have done in life or whatever sin we may have committed in life, God forgives and he is with us. And even we who are sinners, whoever blesses us will be blessed.

That's amazing grace, worthy of all praise. Page 66, another aspect of God worthy of praise is that he is incomparable. And among the gods, there are none who are similar in holiness, power, wisdom, and grace.

So, you have these verses, who is like you among the gods? Or again, he is the king of the gods. He's Lord of Lords, God of gods, and so forth, incomparable. But what do we make of that? When it says, he is the one who is like you among the gods, is it teaching there are other gods? And that's what's often said when he says, there are other gods.

And you get this commonly, he is king of kings, God of gods, Lord of Lords. And that seems to imply there are other gods. The very first commandment of the 10th commandment, you shall have no other god before me assumes there can be another god.

So, what do we do with monotheism? And what happens in comparative religion, they say that Israel at this point had come to the point of henotheism. That is to say, that it began with animism, that these gods were present in all of nature and animals and trees and whatnot. And then they became more abstract in personality and gods of the wind and gods of the rain, a god of the underwater, the storm god, and so forth.

And you end up with polytheism. That is a mixture of nature and a personal being behind the god polytheism. The next step is henotheism where you recognize there are other gods, but you worship only one god.

That's the meaning in Greek one. There's one god you worship, but there are other gods. And then finally you end up where you dismiss all other gods, you get to Isaiah, and so forth.

There are no other gods and you end up in monotheism. So, these statements by David and in his Psalms represent that stage of religion where Moses was of henotheism. I do not accept that.

I do not accept that it is recognized that there really are other gods. As I understand it, we have to distinguish between theological statements and religious commands. The theological statement in Deuteronomy 4.39, it says, that there is no other god.

The religious reality is that people worship what are no gods. They are gods to the people. They aren't really gods, but it's a religious reality.

So, they round them. There are bells and Calvin would say, my mind is manufacturing gods daily, something else to worship that takes away from him. So, we really do worship other gods, but they really don't exist.

So theological statement is there are no other gods. That's a clear teaching of Scripture. But the reality is people are worshipping other gods.

This was the problem. We who have knowledge know there are no other gods says Paul to the Corinthians, but those without knowledge are worshipping other gods. We have to be considerate of them because they may be stumbled by the things that we do.

So, I find it better explanation is to distinguish theological statements from religious commands. So that's what I suggest to think about what we talk about incomparable. He's incomparable to everything else other people can imagine.

There's just no comparison to it or what the ancients worshiped, which were idols. We talk in number 65 about I Am's exalted dwelling and his rule in heaven. You have to, as I said earlier, when we talk about God in heaven and on a throne, anything we say about God is figurative.

God is spirit. It's another dimension that we have never experienced. We can only talk about it in our experience as we have known it.

How would you describe to an unborn child in the womb light, air, the beauty of the creation? All it's known is water, darkness. How do you describe it? You'd have to use metaphor. Something, I don't know what it's like, but you'd have to use something that's very good in the womb.

That would be good. And something that's very bad, but somehow you'd have to use metaphor. So whenever we talk about God, there is an as if.

So, they talk about God. We have to, their as if is in their understanding of the universe, which was a tripartite. So, they had the heaven above and they had the earth and they had the water under the earth.

So, they describe God in terms of the world that they were seeing in their day. So, they picture God to understand his otherness and his rule over everything, his omniscience over everything. It's represented in their cosmology as God sitting on a throne in heaven.

But it's an as if you can't push that, that there really is like crucifix of, well, we got up there in the rock and we looked all around and we didn't see any God up here. You see, he was taking it literally, mocking it really. But there are a lot of Christians that can get stumbled by this because we know that we've got rockets going to other planets out there.

You have to understand it's figurative within the biblical world. And in those figures of speech, it's teaching us about God. So, therefore, I'm suggesting you must have pushed this too literally because we're talking about spirit.

That's the only way I can understand it. I hope that helps you. It helps me.

Okay. So, he is most exalted. He is most high.

So, he says, I am established his throne in the heavens and his majesty reigns over everything. So, it's a way of saying he rules. He's in charge of everything.

There are no accidents. The oppressive image of his omniscience, he looks down on the earth from his heavenly throne, from which the whole world lies at his feet. He sees everything that happens below with his peering eyes.

So that's the way of representing his omniscience. It's the truth that's being represented by this way in that biblical world of representing God. He's the creator and preserver of nature.

So, he not only created everything, he sustains everything. And when he withdraws his hand, it would cease to exist. In the New Testament, it is Christ who sustains all things, Colossians 1. Psalm 104, all creatures look to you to give them their food in this due season.

When you give it to them, they gather it up. When you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed.

When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth. So a way of saying that God is when a new life comes into the world, that's his creation.

And you renew it by your spirit. Again, Gunkel says, and I think it's right. It generally makes no difference in antiquity's observation of the world, whether the events belong to our concept of preservation or to the actual creation.

Every new event appears as a new creation. Yahweh changes darkness into morning and darkens the day to night. He arranges the stars at daybreak.

He calls the stars by name, snow and ice, and especially the rain come from him. He causes the earth to quake. He pours the water down on the earth.

He stills the roaring of the rushing flood. In summary, he does great things that are not required and miracles that cannot be counted. And again, he manifests himself in the whole creation.

So, to picture it, the whole thing is a manifestation of his creation. Light is God's coat. The clouds, his chariot, wind and flames, his messengers.

He marches over the high places of the earth. If the earthquakes, it's because the Lord looked at it. If the mountains smoke, it's because the Lord touched them.

When the change of season causes life and death to enter the world, the reason is that the Lord has inhaled and exhaled his life-protecting breath. The Hebrew poet signifies the harmony of the spheres as a song that the heavens sing to honor God. So, he manifests himself in the creation.

When we look at the creation, we should see God himself. He has dominion over all, over humanity. And I give you the material there.

It says the hymn loves to describe both sides of the divine act in sharp contrast. Yahweh kills and brings to life. He takes down to Sheol and leads up.

Yahweh makes the poor and the rich. He humbles and exalts. The point is also that we didn't know the incommunicable and communicable attributes have to go together.

Because if God was all-powerful and no one can curb him, he could be a despot. But because he's faithful and merciful, he's a benevolent despot, if you want to use that

word, a benevolent king. On the other hand, if he just had the communicable attributes of mercy and grace, they would have no power.

They couldn't be effective, but because he's omnipotent, he can exercise his mercy. So, you have to have the two together because faithfulness guarantees us that God is not a despot. On the other hand, that he's all-powerful assures us that he's able to carry through his grace and his mercy.

So, we need them in balance with one another. Number seven is his love and his faithfulness. These are the two primary, the love one is the primary attribute that is celebrated in the Old Testament and in the book of Psalms.

It's the Hebrew word hesed, H E S E D. Only the first letter you put a little fricative in it. It's hesed. So, I remember one day in the first year I was teaching Hebrew and I was trying to distinguish between H and H. So I called on the attendance back then, and called on a student.

He said that's the word hesed. The word hesed means help to the helpless out of whatever it is in the person that's kind, and loving. The King James translates it 13 words ways.

The word entails a relationship. There are two people that have a relationship. They are partners.

One person is in desperate need, and the weaker party is in desperate need and cannot help himself or herself. They're in need and can't help themselves. The stronger person who can meet the need steps in and meets that need out of love, kindness, whatever it is, not out of duress, not out of self-motivation, not out of getting anything out of it, just out of love.

That's why it's translated in the King James by unfailing love. So, a good illustration of that is Joseph. He for a while had identified with Egypt.

He felt he had been abandoned by his family. He had married an Egyptian wife. He named his children after Egypt.

He began to settle down. Well, I don't have a family back home. They just sold me.

So, he began to identify with Egypt. But when he saw the family again, he saw God's providence. Now he's fully related to his father.

And so he says to his brother, when he's dying, this is the hesed you shall show me. You will carry my bones to where Abraham, Isaac, up to Shechem and you will bury me in my father's land. He cannot bury himself.

He's totally helpless. He's totally dependent upon those who are alive to do what he cannot do. And they do it out of love for their brother.

That gives you an idea. Another illustration would be Ruth. And Ruth is this tremendous story of hesed.

She was totally loyal to her deceased, Machlan. He died in Moab. He dies without children.

He will die without prosperity or any social memory. And she comes back by faith. Ruth had told her, Naomi had told her, you have no future here, but know your people, my people, your God, my God.

She trusted God. She went back and eventually this great man, Boaz, marries her. And he says to her, when on the bed scene, he said, it was her chesed that she returned with Naomi, but your second hesed that you remained loyal to your husband's family.

You didn't go after money. You didn't go after sex, young men. You were loyal to the family and you wanted to do the family redeemer.

Your second hesed, your second loyalty to your deceased is greater than your first. And that child was to be given birth in the name of Machlan, but God in his grace, because of Boaz's great act of kindness, it's Boaz's name that got into the Messianic line of the Lord Jesus Christ. But her loyalty to her deceased husband who could not have children.

So, she would have children in his name. That's her hesed. So hesed is where you are in a situation that you're utterly hopeless.

God's hesed to us is the fact we're here. He's remained loyal to Abraham. He made a commitment to Abraham.

He made a commitment to Isaac. He made a commitment to Jacob that your seed will bless the earth. And here we are.

We are here because of God's hesed. He remained loyal to his covenant promises. And that's a guarantee that he will remain loyal to us, even in death, that we will triumph over death because of his hesed.

And then we have, so I give you a lot of verses from Gunkel. I'm not going to read any more. Now I get into something more difficult.

On page 68, it glorifies God's past deeds at the creation. And here I'm wrestling with that the way it glorifies God in creation is by using ancient Near Eastern myths. The creation is described in the terms of the pagan myths.

So, for example, the major myth of the Babylonians was called the Enuma elish, E-N-U-M-A-E-L-I-S-H, when the gods Enuma elish. The creation story is that you had a Tiamat, a monster that was represented by water. Marduk was the great hero and he slaughtered the monster.

Out of that monster, he created the earth. That's the myth. It's called Chaos Kampf, that is it's chaos.

There was a battle and the battle was between the heroic God and this monster that represented chaos. The heroic God defeated the chaos and created the cosmos out of the chaos. It's all in a mythology of personalities.

In other words, it's very similar to Genesis 1. As I understand Genesis 1, you start off, with the earth was in darkness and water. It's chaos. And it's called, actually the Hebrew there is the word for it is Tiamat, Tehom, rather the depth Tehom, which is equal to the Tiamat, but it's totally demythologized.

It's just there's a Tehom, there's a depth, there's a deep. God created light and overcame the darkness and he overcame the chaotic waters. So, God overcame the darkness and the chaos and he did it by means of light.

So, it's simply a statement of fact. But the poets describe it, not as we have it in Genesis 1, which is prose, but they're poets and they use personification. They use the pagan myths as a way of showing the greatness of God that he is the one that overcame the chaotic monster, if you please.

And so, it's sort of like Milton or in say, Paradise Lost, he will refer to the Greek mythologies. He will talk about Zeus. He will talk about Job.

He will talk about Jupiter. We all know he doesn't believe that, but it's a way of poets using figurative language to communicate their thought. The Hebrew poets feel secure in using those pagan myths in order to show the greatness of God in creation.

It's sort of also a polemic. It wasn't Baal that did this. It wasn't Marduk that did it.

It was the Lord, our God, he's the one that overcame the chaos and transformed it. Unless we understand that, there are a lot of scholars uses to show pagan mythology. And I've said, no, this is poetry.

They're using it. They feel secure. We all know these gods don't exist, but this describes the greatness of our God and the way he created it.

So, I say, they use pagan imagery such as Marduk's and this battle against chaos, Marduk with Theomar. It's also used in the Ugaritic text. And this is found not only in, it's found throughout the ancient Near East and all their myths.

It's a chaotic battle. And in the Ugaritic text, the created God is Baal. He's the God of storm and lightning, as I said yesterday.

And he battles in one set of myths, he battles against Yam, which is the sea. So, you have the God of lightning and rain and life who is battling against the sea, which is the symbol of chaos. The sea will destroy your crops.

You can't exist there. Whereas you need Baal with the rain that gives you your crops. So, they picture it as a battle between Baal and the sea.

Or another myth is Baal against death. So that's the background. Or the other chaotic gods can be Rahab or a Leviathan.

So you're reading the Bible about Rahab and most people don't know who Rahab is and who Leviathan is, but they are the gods of chaos in these myths. These mythological illusions occur only in poetry and add vividness and color to the poem. They also function as a polemic against the pagan gods.

The sublimities attributed to the pagan gods belong, in fact, to I Am. So here you have, for example, Psalm 74, but God is my King from long ago. He brings salvation on the earth.

It was you who split open the sea by your power. See, it isn't simply said, let the land appear. It's a battle.

He split open the sea by your power. You broke the heads of the monster in the waters, those chaotic forces. Thus, he's referring to these myths of the chaotic forces against him.

It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave it as food to the creatures of the desert. It was you who opened the springs and streams. You dried up the ever-flowing rivers.

The day is yours and yours also the night. You established the sun and moon. It was you who set up all the boundaries of the earth.

You made both summer and winter. So, it is you who defeated the forces of chaos. It's put in this living language, but it's poetry.

You can't say it. There's literally a Rahab and a Leviathan. It's a way of representing his overcoming the forces of chaos.

Again, this is from 89. Who is like you Lord of God Almighty, you Lord Almighty, and your faithfulness surround you. You rule over the surging sea when its waves mount up, you still them.

See the sea is a symbol of chaos. They didn't come through a landscape artist with a sea in the sea in any romantic way or take me down to the sea again to the lonely sea in the sky. Give me a tall ship and a star to steer her by.

They had no romantic notions about the sea. It was chaos and they dreaded the sea. So, it represents what is opposed to life.

So, he says, you rule over the surging sea when its waves mount up, you still them. You crushed Rahab like one of the Spain with your strong arm, you scattered your enemies. The heavens are yours and yours also the earth.

You founded the world and all that is in them. Or to give you another comparison, this is a comparison of say one of the texts of the Ugaritic text, the first line. It talks about the crooked dragon, the mighty one of seven heads.

This is Isaiah. On that day, God will visit with a sword that is that mighty, great and powerful, with a sword that is mighty and great and powerful. Leviathan, the evil serpent, even Leviathan the crooked serpent, slay the monster of the sea.

So, it uses this kind of language. It's like I say Milton or an English poet will refer to Greek mythology. The Hebrew poets refer to pagan mythology in order to illustrate who God is and that he is greater than these pagan gods.

Let me give another one on this kind of difficult material, but I think it should be handled. I think it confuses people. It says, Leviathan at Harvard, the sea was the great enemy of order, both in Mesopotamia and in Canaan.

Its defeat, taming it, overcoming it. That's what you have literally in Genesis 1. He overcomes the abyss and the sea. Its defeat was the essential element in creation and won the victorious God kingship and the right to a palace or a temple of his own.

That was in the pagan myths. After the God they worshiped conquered the sea, represented as a God, then that victorious God could build a palace to secure the

order or a palace for God as a temple. So, creation, kingship, and temple thus form an indissoluble triad.

The containment of the sea is the continuing proof of their eternal validity. So, it's put in Psalm 93. I don't think you can understand this psalm without a background that this undesirable triad of creation, kingship, and temple are at stake.

That's how it was in the beginning. In fact, God overcomes the sea today is proof that he retains, and sustains the creation. Here's Psalm 93, the Lord reigns.

He is robed in majesty. The Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength. Indeed, the world is established firm and secure.

In other words, the Lord is all-powerful and with his strength, the world is established firm and secure. Now it talks about your throne. Your throne was established long ago.

You are from all eternity. But now notice what threatens. The sea has lifted up, Lord.

The sea has lifted up their voice. The sea has lifted up its pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea, the Lord on high is mighty.

He overcomes all threats and he's clothed in strength. Notice how it ends. Your statutes, Lord, stand firm.

Holiness adorns your house for endless days. There we have creation, kingship, temple, and it is God who did it all. And so it's this knowledge of this background that can help us to understand Psalms like this.

Psalm 29 adopts and adapts a hymn to Baal in all probability. Baal is the God of the storm. Listen to the Psalm, the Psalm of David.

Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord, glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord, the glory due his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

The voice of the Lord is thunder. The voice of the Lord is over the waters. Think of the Mediterranean.

The God of glory thunders in his power. The Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful.

The voice of the Lord is majestic. That is the thunder. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars.

The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. But notice where the storm is going. It's in Lebanon, in the country of Lebanon.

That's the center of Baal worship. So, he sees the storm coming off the Mediterranean. He sees in the storm, the mighty power of God in the crashing thunder, in the flashing lightning.

All of this represents the great power of God as he moves across. Then he makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Syrian like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning.

The voice of the Lord shakes the desert. The Lord shakes the desert of Kaddish. In other words, the storm has now come off the Mediterranean.

The storm is now going over the Lebanese mountains. He smashes the proud and mighty cedars of Lebanon. The cedars represent what is mighty and majestic.

God just smashes it in the storm, and shatters it entirely. But now the storm is dying out. Kaddish is on the east side of the anti-Lebanon mountains.

So the Lord shakes the desert of Kaddish. The voice of the Lord twists the oak and strips the forest bare and in his temple, all cry glory. The Lord sits enthroned over the flood.

The Lord is enthroned as King forever. The Lord gives strength to his people. The Lord blesses his people with peace.

So, he could see the great power of God in the storm. It occurs in the very heart of Baal country. That's to assure us that this God of power is the God who is with us.

That's where it ends. The Lord gives strength to his people. So that's a bit more daunting, but yet I felt in a course on Psalms, we should handle some of this difficult material.

We now go to page 71, the praise of God who led his people in the past as he dwells together with his people. No texts are cited here, but it is God with his people, his presence with his people in the Exodus, and in the conquest and settlement of the land. Gunkel comments that this idea of the history of a God being with his people in the historical process has no counterpart in Babylonian and Egyptian literature.

We can now add it has no counterpart in Ugarit. In the pagan literature, there's no idea of history going anywhere. Their whole idea is to recreate the earth annually, but there's no sense to any meaning of history.

There's no beginning. There's no end. There's no climax, no victory of righteousness over evil.

There's no metaphysical point to history, no reality behind it. This is where the Bible distinguishes itself. So, the Psalms celebrate the history of Israel, looking to an eschaton when the Lord will reign universally and righteousness will prevail.

There's nothing like that in the ancient Near East. So, you have these outward symbols where they use pagan mythology. But as Henri Frankfort said, there's no umbilical cord connected to the theology of the Bible with the pagan literature. It has an outward form, but a very different theology.

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