

God is Great

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Psalm 104 begins, *Bless the Lord, O my soul! O LORD my God, you are very great!* Now, he says *O my soul* he's using the most comprehensive word possible. In Hebrew world the soul stood for the mind, heart, spirit, and in psalm 103, this psalm's twin, he says Bless the Lord *with all that is within me*. Why should we do that? *You are very great!* God is described as great quite often, but this is the only occurrence I could find where he's *very* great. You see the author is really putting it out there. He's saying: *you should praise God like nothing else because he is exceedingly great*. What's the proof? Let's see.

Transcendent Beauty

In England earlier this summer, I woke up early and looked out the window of our second story room. My eyes scrambled across a field and up a hill to a rocky outcropping that stained the sky and I felt this call: "Come. Come hike, climb, come play." Have you ever felt that call? A desire to wade into wonder: plunge headfirst into a lake, drink in fresh, forest air on a greenbelt hike, stop and soak in a red-orange sunset? Why do we feel this way? *Because the cosmos is a temple*. Probably not the answer you'd think of but look at vs. 2-3: *He stretches the heavens like a tent and lays beams for his chamber on the waters* These are rudimentary, architectural features of God's house. The heavens are his tent. They're are not what we call atmosphere; it's *space*: *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their starry host* (Ps 33:6, NIV). The stars occupy the heavens, and the heavens—space—is his roof! Next the framing. The beams that hold up the roof are laid in the waters. What's that a reference to? "The waters above" in Genesis 1; it's the atmosphere. Roof, framing, and if you look out on the driveway you'll see God's chariot, which he drives *across the clouds*. Isaiah puts it together like this: *The heavens are his throne and the earth is his footstool* 66:1. Now we've got temple furniture! His throne is in space; the earth is his ottoman. *This king is so great his house is a universe, and the universe is his temple*. In a word, he's **transcendent**. On the scale of greatness, he's off the charts. Now what's in a temple? Gods. What do you do in a temple? Worship. *That's why we hear a call*. Every single human has been placed in this cosmic temple *to worship God*. Is that how you treat God? Or do you treat him like an aide? Aide to parenting so kids turn out, aide to marriage so it gets better, aide to your career so you can succeed, an aide to meaning so you can make sense of the world. *Is your god an aide not an end? Helpful but not worshipful?* Then you're not heeding the call. Next we're told he is *clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment*. What does *this* tell us about God? That he's not only transcendent but **beautiful**. He covers himself in light, one of the four fundamental forces of nature, comprised of photons necessary for life, filled with wavelengths that display an array of color to the human eye. *Light is God's wardrobe*. Our sun a sequin on his robe. Next, he's wrapped in splendor and majesty. A couple of weeks ago the Internet lit up with stunning images from Webb Space Telescope, revealing a cluster of galaxies, and GLASS, the oldest known galaxy was discovered, with the mass of a billion suns. Splendor and majesty. *Glass is a button on God's garment*. Beautiful, stunning, and yet *God's clothing conceals as much as it reveals*. It reveals the beauty of God—wrapped in light—but maintains a degree of mystery: *how awesome must you be to be clothed in cosmic light?* Put it all together, cosmic temple and photonic clothing, and you've got *transcendent beauty*. How should we respond? Austin-based outdoor clothing brand Howler Bros tagline is: *Heed the Call*. Heed what call? They mean the call to get out in the wild, go for a hike, fly fish, follow *the call* into creation. But is that call coming from?

A call means there's a caller. The divine Caller is beckoning you to worship *him* with all your soul. You see, God *is* very great.

God's Creative Glory

If verse 1-4 reflect on God's character, transcendent beauty, verse 5-23, riff on his creation. First, he **creates** *habitats*. **He set the earth on its foundations...and covered it with the deep, the waters stood above the mountains** (5-6). The first two habitats: the earth and the sea. But why is the earth, the mountains, immersed in water? It's an allusion to Genesis 1:2, where the Spirit hovers over the deep waters to create the heavens and the earth. What Greek philosophers call cosmogony, the birth of the cosmos. And if you look at their stories, or further back to the poet's time, the ANE creation stories, creation was often the result of a fight. Marduk slays Tiamat and makes the cosmos from her carcass. But in the Hebrew concept of creation God subdues the deep, not gods. Why? *He's unrivaled*. Creation is not the product of war but of free, divine, creative will. Now, how does this interface with modern science? Well, creation is the product of the Big Bang, and there seems to be evidence for some kind of super-dense cosmos creating event (like let there be Light). *But one of the problems with the Big Bang is that everything is made by nothing*. The origin of creation is made by an unaccounted for force. Which means there is no call to heed. As a result, worship gets focused on creation not a Creator, on science or the scientist, the art or the artist. The things we make. NPR radio does this thing called the Tiny Desk Concert, where undiscovered artists can submit their work. Lillian Frances filmed her entry on a portledge off a cliff in Lake Tahoe. She plays the guitar and sings while standing on a fabric ledge off the ground. What motivated her to do this? She combined her two loves: climbing and music. She comments on why she creates: I'm not just falling in love with a new piece of music, but I'm falling in love with a new piece of me...Creating music is really an act of self-love. You see when *if we don't have a Creator to worship, we will worship the creation*. Our creation becomes a god, not a temple. We love the mountains but not their Maker. We devote ourselves to work but Sunday worship is optional. Why? It's a distraction from self-praise. We welcome the lie that *we're made to be praised* instead of the truth that *we're made for praise*. And when people really kill it in their work, we worship them: actors, athletes, artists. Think about it. Which do you know more about: your favorite artist or athlete or the attributes of God? But worship-level fame is not all it's cracked up to be. In a candid interview, actress Alicia Vikander confessed after grasping her coveted Oscar: **In other people's eyes, [when] I was at my height of fame, I was the most sad. We were created not to be praised but to give praise.** *What are you working for? Creation or the Creator?* Next we see God **sustains** *the inhabitants* of the habitats. In verses 11-22 God provides for: the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the beasts of the earth: **Gives drink to every beast of the field, donkeys their thirst, the lion their prey, plants for man to cultivate**. God doesn't create and step back; he's engaged, sustains all things: **These all look to you, to give them their food in due season** (27). If he withdraws his hand, we perish. All our abilities are from him. Finally God **delights** in his creation. Things don't just function; they sing: **springs gush, birds sing, faces shine, seas teem, man's heart gladdened, trees watered abundantly**. Lavish delight. **the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work** 13. God gladdens the heart and satisfies the earth. What would it look like if you worked as though God delights in your work? You might pray before and after work, enlisting his help in the morning and praising him for his provision at night. Instead of charging into the day self-dependent, we'd pause to pray for each child, client, meeting, project or goal, and then trust the results to God. We would seek to praise the Creator not the creation. We would be like description of creation, satisfied. Why should we worship God? He creates, sustains, and delights in all creation! Surely he is very

great.

Conclusion

Why should we praise God—because he is very great. He is transcendent beauty. He creates, sustains, and delights in all creation. The poet concludes by drawing our attention to the *one being* made for fame: *May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works* (31). The LORD is deserving of endless praise; his glory will be eternally fascinating. So how should we respond? He gives us two ways: sing and meditate. **Sing**: give melodic expression to God's glory. It is not fitting to respond to him creatively, in song, as he has creatively given to us? If we can sing our heads off at a concert extoling an artist, then surely we can burst with praise in church to our Creator? *I will sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being* (33). **Meditate**: contemplate his character. Not just a rush of emotion but reflection on who God is. May my meditation be pleasing to him, for I rejoice in the LORD (34). Wickedness will one day be removed from the earth, and all things will be realigned to their eternal purpose to glorify God and enjoy him forever. *Bless the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!*