

Praise the Lord

Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD! (Psa 150:1-6)

What does it mean to ‘praise the Lord? Over and over, we read the words, ‘Praise the Lord, praise the Lord’, so perhaps we need to answer – what is it to praise the Lord, why should we do it and how do we do it? For many, praising the Lord is the modern, Western equivalent of laying some berries and fruit at the bottom of the stone idol. We do not really see the point of this endeavour; we do not, in all honesty, enjoy it very much, but it seems like this god expected it, so let’s do it, and try to stay out of trouble.

For many, praise is like offering compliments up to some very insecure Being in the heavens, who hopefully will feel better about himself. If that sounds close to blasphemy consider – the blasphemy is not in suggesting such an idea, the blasphemy consists in the fact that many Christians operate that way and perceive God that way every day. For others, praise is just a filler in the Sunday services – a kind of light entertainment leading up to the sermon. For others, praise is entertainment in concentrated form. Their concept of praise is closer to the orgiastic worship of Baal, as they seek highs and thrills from the praise experience itself. For others still, praise is a dead, ritualistic, solemn occasion, a rather tedious burden that must be borne. Piercing through the smoke of all this confusion is the Biblical view of praise.

What a breath of fresh air would blow through the church if Christians earnestly and diligently sought out the true meaning, and the true practice of “Praise the Lord”

I. The Object of Praise – The LORD

The Psalm begins by calling on us to praise the Lord. Notice that our praise is to have an object, The LORD. The Psalm does not simply say “Praise” it says – “Praise the Lord”. And in case you would confuse Him with any Lord, he qualifies it with ‘Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! “ Only the Creator – the Great I AM dwells in the heavens. This is like the qualifier which Jesus put on the Lord’s Prayer – “*Our Father, which art in heaven.*”

Praise is directed toward a Person. It is not praise for the sake of praise. Do you know that many Christians today praise, praise? They do not praise God, they praise the ‘praise & worship’ time. They praise the celebration itself. To put it another way – they desire the emotion of praise more than the object of praise Himself. God becomes a means to an end for them; He is simply the springboard off which they leap to get their emotional high. But the Psalmist insists that our praise terminate on none other than God Himself. This implies an intelligent, personal acquaintance with God. It implies that the Psalmist expects you, in some measure to know this Lord he is speaking about.

Now until I got some help from some other believers who had thought this through, it always bothered me at the back of my mind, that God should inspire humans to write the words “Praise God” I mean, why should an all-sufficient, all-complete God, command me to praise Him? I recall one of my high school teachers challenging me on my faith by saying – “I refuse to worship a God who commands me to worship Him!” And from a certain point of view he had a point. Why should a complete God, demand or command my praise? Well, faulty logic will assume that if He desires our praise he cannot be complete, and therefore He must be less than God. But that is anthropomorphizing God. It is assuming human qualities about God. The kinds of humans that demand and seek praise from others are insecure and incomplete.

But what if we take it from another angle? God is complete, and all-sufficient. Our praising Him does not complete Him one bit. While God delights in the praises of His people, He does not need them to store up some supposed weakness in Himself. So, He must have another reason for commanding our praise. What if our praising God does not complete God, but completes us? What if the act of praising God from the heart is the highest, most wonderful, transcendent experience a human can enter into? If that is true, I would say, that when God calls on us to praise Him, He is loving us! He is saying – enter in, for your own good, into the most blessed place possible – a human exulting in His Creator.

Well, that explanation makes far more sense. It also explains why the Psalmists are so often calling us to praise God in a way which suggests they have entered into this blessed state and now call us to join them. Have you ever noticed that when someone is praising something, that call on you to join them, to agree with them. Someone is praising the sunset in their mind, and soon they ask you to agree with them. “Isn’t it incredible?” Someone is enjoying a dessert, and they say to you, “This is delicious, isn’t it?” Whether it is the countryside, or music, or human beauty, or cars, or artwork, or clothes, or the stars – the world rings with praise. And it is as if, when we are so filled with the joy of praise, that we turn to others to almost complete the joy! We want others to agree with us – it’s great, it’s marvellous, it’s wondrous! And this, I believe is what is behind the book of Psalms. There is a personal, deep, rich experience and acquaintance with God that so thrill the Psalmists, that under inspiration of the Holy Spirit their joy bubbles over into, “Praise the Lord with me!”

Now, when last was our experience of God so rich, that we could not help calling on another human to agree with us on how glorious God is? I would go so far as to say – your praise is your spiritual thermometer. The state of your fervency for God if you are on fire for Him will be seen in your praise. When God is real and the weight of His glory begins to so enthuse your soul, it becomes such a fire in your thoughts and bones it must come out!

II. The Reasons for Praise

The Psalmist now turns to perhaps the most important aspect of all and that is the reason for praise. Why should we praise God? We said it is not to meet His needs. We said it is

because praising Him will be the ultimate joy for a human. But why? What is it about God that will so cause me to treasure God, to prize Him? He gives us two categories – What God has done, His mighty deeds; and Who God is, His excellent greatness. In other words God's nature and God's acts. God as a noun and God as a verb. Well, let's try and unpack those thoughts for a few moments here.

Let's take the category of who He is – His nature. In the Psalms, we find the Psalmists extolling three things about God, which I believe, if we ourselves meditated on would cause us to praise God the way the Psalmists do. The first thing about God's nature that makes God so valuable, so worth prizing if He is yours and you are His – is His Uniqueness.

“For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?” (Psa 89:6-7)

Now, is it not true that in our world, the rarer something is the greater its value and desirability. The rarer a painting, the rarer a jewel, a coin, a stamp, a car, even a near – extinct animal, the more we treasure it. We say there is not much of this thing, it is precious. Well, when you begin to meditate on God's uniqueness, you realise that God is the rarest Being of all. God is not simply the highest being at the top of the ladder, He is altogether different. He is not simply the perfect form of His creation; He is unique and transcendent from it. Michael is the archangel – but he is one of many angels. You and I are all different, and in a sense, unique humans, but we are all humans. No one is like God. He is the rarest Being of all. That makes Him the most precious Being of all. In fact, the Hebrew word for holy, really implies uniqueness. God is distinct, unique, separate, and holy from his creation. The seraphim essentially cry out night and day: “Unique, unique, unique is the Lord of hosts” Have you taken time to savour this thought – the rarest Being of all is your Father, if you are saved? The most precious Being of all has fellowship with you if you are born again? Praise the Lord.

Another part of God's nature that the Psalmists extol is God's Supremacy:

“From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised! The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? “ (Psa 113:3-6)

God is supreme. God is exalted above all. Why does the Psalmist consider this a joy, something to be prized? Well, again consider our human experience. What is the most popular copyrighted book ever published outside of religious books? The Guinness Book of Records. Why? Man is fascinated at what is supreme. We want to know what is the biggest, highest furthest, largest, richest. We want to know who is strongest, fastest, oldest, most intelligent. When something is the best, the greatest, the superlative – we treasure it. You see people boasting in their possessions: “It's the newest; it's the fastest; it's the top of the line”. Well, when it comes to any area of life, God is supreme. Were

you to hold a competition in any area – beauty, wisdom, age, power, knowledge, love, God would always win. He is supreme. And again, the Psalmists say that this supreme God is his God. He has covenanted with me! I have come to know Him and walk with Him by experience, and I cannot stop talking about Him – my God – the supreme God!

The third aspect of God’s Nature that the Psalmists extol are His Attributes. Throughout the Psalms, the Psalmists praise God for His various attributes:

“Be exalted, O LORD, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power.”

(Psa 21:13)

“Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.”

(Psa 63:3)

Whether it is God’s wisdom, or justice, or power, or knowledge, or presence, or eternity, or any of His many other attributes – the Psalmists praise God for them. In everyday life it is the same. We treasure and value, and then praise things for their attributes. We praise our material objects for their strength and durability; we praise our dog for its loyalty; we praise houses for their beauty; we praise people for their gentleness, or kindness, or patience. Whatever we praise, we praise because its attributes are delightful to us.

May I suggest that if you want to be someone who praises God, spend some time searching out the manifold attributes of God in His Word. For human help I recommend you read books devoted to that subject. A.W. Tozer’s – *The Knowledge of the Holy*, J.I. Packer’s *Knowing God*, A.W. Pink’s *The Attributes of God*, John Piper’s *The Pleasures of God*. And again, the reason for the Psalmist’s joy is that He sees these attributes of God are exercised in his direction, as one of God’s people. The Puritan Brooks put it this way:.. “that is as if he said, You shall have as true an interest in all my attributes, as they are my own glory...My grace, saith God, shall be yours to pardon you, and my power shall be yours to protect you, and my wisdom shall be yours to direct you, and my goodness shall be yours to relieve you, and my mercy shall be yours to supply you, and my glory shall be yours to crown you. This is a comprehensive promise, for God to be our God; it includes all.”

Do you take time to rejoice that God’s love is for you; His power is for you, His wisdom, His longsuffering, His grace, His mercy, His holiness, His justice - they are there to be known and rejoiced in for your joy and God’s glory.

Praise God’s Nature – who He is. He is unique; He is supreme; He is glorious in His attributes. But the Psalmist said in Psalm 150 that we are also to praise Him for His mighty deeds i.e. what He has done. So we treasure God not only for His nature, but for His works.

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed

like the eagle's. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.”
(Psa 103:2-6)

Again, in life, we measure how much we value and praise something, very often, by what it does for us, the benefits it brings to our lives. It might be status, knowledge, power, honour, security, comfort, luxury, pleasure, peace, ease, convenience, health, sustenance, purpose, entertainment, fulfilment, protection. Whatever something brings us causes us to attach a certain amount of value to it. We prize it in accordance with its value. Now, don't take this in the wrong way. God is not man's servant. But God does delight to show Himself strong to us on our behalf. When we find, through experience, that God brings security, peace, purpose, knowledge, honour, joy, pleasure, fulfilment, protection – then we treasure God and praise Him. God is not demeaned when we say: God is the greatest possible benefit to my life.” God is demeaned when we say, “I am so self-sufficient I don't need God to meet any needs in me”. We magnify God's glorious attributes when we admit He is what we need to meet our every need. So we praise Him for what He does; how He helps, guides, teaches, protects, shapes, disciplines, fulfils, and blesses us with so many good things. Gratitude! Thank you God for grace – for giving the unworthy what they did not deserve, and withholding what we did deserve.

Now, you might be asking a good question in your heart. How do I come to the place where I prize God for His nature and for His acts? How do I come to a place of joy for God uniqueness, supremacy, attributes and acts on my behalf? I would answer – meditation and obedience. You know, for the things we prize in everyday life, we spend considerable time thinking about why we treasure them so much. We admire, we consider, we roll over in our minds why we treasure and value that thing, place or person. Meditation on God in the Scriptures and in prayer, considering why we treasure God. If you do not take the time to consistently meditate on God's Person as He relates to you, you will find that He will be fairly low on your list of things that you prize. Meditation – your quiet time, also times of solitude, times of reflection.

Secondly, obedience. People come to prize things, places and people because they actually engage those things. They spend time with the person, they go to the place, they listen to the music, they eat the food, they drive the car, they put on the garment, they read the book. You will not find out how the glory of God relates to you unless, in submission to the Holy Spirit, you step out to obey God's commands. It is then that you will see Him at work in you, through you, and around you. If your view of God has grown small and dull, I would ask you if you have sought to be deliberate in your everyday obedience. Look for God in His Word and His Works. The Holy Spirit will illuminate and reveal Christ to the thirsty heart. The joy that follows will soon become public. We will not be able to contain the kind of gladness that comes to the heart that has just tasted the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. The Methods for Praise

The Psalmist now goes on to give us the methods of praise. And his first thought is that of music - music is a gift of God. It allows our thoughts and emotions to travel onto a level which the spoken word cannot reach. It gives wings to emotions that would be

earthbound without it. God has surrounded Himself with music since the creation of the word; we find that in the book of Job. In Zephaniah, we find God Himself singing. Music is a powerful gift that expresses your views of God, and, I believe Scripture very clearly teaches – can influence your view of God. When we have a right view of God, I believe we will have the right music to carry those views of God. So the Psalmist lists the different kinds of instruments we might use in musical praise. Interestingly enough, he lists all the major categories of instrument: Wind (trumpet, pipe), strings (harp & lute), percussion, and (tambourine, sounding & clashing cymbals). Now he also lists something which would disturb a modern, conservative Christian audience – dance.

Now, anyone who has observed a Jewish dance knows it is far from the sensual, evil dance of the Western nightclub. It was a celebratory, glad, corporate dance. Nothing in it would revoke evil thoughts in others. Moreover, it was a response to music that was not deliberately made for evil purposes. You can see how dance was used for evil purposes in Exodus 32, where the people worshipped the golden calf. Dance is simply humans responding to music physically. When the music is contrived for sensual purposes, the dance will be sensual and evil. When the music is formed for godly purposes, the dance can be pleasing to God. Now in our Western culture, not much remains of simple folk dances. Overwhelmingly, the dances known to us speak of immorality and seduction, such that, even appropriate dance would probably have a strong negative reaction from evangelical or fundamentalist Christians. So, I believe the best way of understanding this in our context is to say: praise God all of you, all the time

Jewish worship included bowing, kneeling, prostrating, clapping, dancing, shouting, and lifting eyes and hands to the Lord. Instead of sitting in pews, the people were physically involved in worship. There's nothing wrong with sitting in the pews. Worship is more than just sitting and listening, it involves a release of the whole person before God. And it means that we do so not only on certain days. We need to have a wholehearted celebration of God. This is the method. Use appropriate music. Use appropriate words. Use song, testimony, music – but in it all, wholeheartedly praise the Lord.

IV. The Subjects of Praise

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Who is to praise God – all the living. Now the animals praise God in the sense that they fulfil their created purpose. But not all humans praise God. The unsaved certainly do not praise God. Many believers do not praise God. So what is the Psalmist calling for? Evangelism and personal revival. If someone does not yet know God, how are they to praise Him? But the Psalmist wants them to praise Him as well. He wants all to know the joy of praising God. John Piper put it well when he said, “Missions exists because worship doesn't.” In other words, we take the Gospel out because people all over, are not worshipping. This is the heart of our personal and corporate evangelism – “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord”. Again, recall the Psalmists' enthusiasm for us to join him in praising is because of his own satisfied heart. His own exulting experience of God causes him to call on us to complete his joy in agreeing that God is great and greatly to be praised. It is the same joy in God that motivates evangelism. When we are full and overflowing, we call on our neighbours, our colleagues, our relatives, our friends, our associates, even strangers to

come to know God through Jesus Christ and know that joy. And if you do not know that joy, then the call is for personal revival - to go before God and plead: restore to me the joy of your salvation. So fill my quiet times with illumination that I barely contain the joy. So fill my prayer life with the presence of God, that it becomes a huge satisfaction to my soul. So reveal yourself to me in my obedience and service that I see your works and magnify you. God be real to me again!

People praise what they prize. They prize, for the most part, what they have experienced. When we praise God, without prizing God there is a word for that – hypocrisy. God said of Israel, “This people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me” God is grieved when we mouth songs of praise, with cold hearts, but throughout the week, naturally, gladly, spontaneously praise our garden, our car, a recipe, a restaurant, a place, a song, a Christian book.

The key is to work from the inside out. Don’t try to simply grin when you sing – that’s not the answer. Don’t try to feel happy when you sing – that’s not the answer. Get back into His Word and prayer and obedience till His glory begins to become a joy too great to keep to yourself.