

The Wisdom Literature

Lesson #6

Psalms Of Praise

Introduction

- There is a story told of a fellow who visited an assembly one morning and, during the sermon, kept saying, "Praise the Lord!" whenever a particularly good point was made. Afterwards, a stern deacon approached the older gentleman and rebuked him saying, "Look, Mister, we don't praise the Lord around here!" (cf. 2 Samuel 6:14-16).
- This story, likely anecdotal, is not as funny as it first sounds and makes a valid point. God said long ago through the prophet, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:3). Even your dog knows who takes care of him and licks you for it, but do we consider who takes care of us? Do we praise Him?

Praise Desired And Demanded

- The subject of praise is of vital interest to the Christian because it is something God both desires and demands (Ephesians 1:12; Philippians 1:11; Hebrews 13:15).
- If we do not praise God in life, we will praise Him in judgment (Romans 14:10-12; Revelation 19:5).

Praise Defined

- What does it mean to praise God? The Oxford American Dictionary says offering praise is to "express warm approval or admiration of." It comes from an Old French word meaning "prize" which, in turn, is from a Latin term meaning "price." The idea is that someone is held in high esteem because of their perceived value -- their virtues or accomplishments. Synonyms for praise are words like "acclaim," "extol" and "laud." These are words for expressing one's highest approval of somebody or something and often imply public accord for such favor.
 - To "acclaim" somebody is collectively to praise or pronounce him or something he has done worthy of honor.
 - "Extol" suggests resounding praise in a lofty style. It means to proclaim excellence, often repeatedly or excessively.
 - "Laud" expresses respectful tribute given formally and decisively, usually for a particular deed. These definitions are clearly demonstrated to be accurate as we examine the praise Psalms.
- Hailey lists twenty-five psalms that fall into the "praise" category (8, 18, 19, 24, 33, 40, 47, 75, 87, 92, 93, 95, 96, 98, 99, 103, 107, 108, 117, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150). In addition, there are major portions of

many others that reflect the author's and/or singers praise to God. In our present study we will look at three of these psalms.

Psalm 100

- Psalm 100 is the shortest of the praise psalms. It is a call for "all ye lands" to shout joyfully to the Lord, serve Him and worship before Him with joyful singing.
- Rather than bless the name of vain idols, five reasons are given as to why they ought to enter His courts with praise and thanksgiving.
 - The Lord made us, we did not make ourselves (vs. 3a). He is the Creator, we are the created. Hear the voice of the twenty-four elders as they worship (Revelation 4:11). All mankind is dependent upon, not independent of, God and should praise Him as the maker of all.
 - All mankind belongs to Him (vs. 3b). Because "God is the King of all the earth" we should sing His praises (Psalm 24:1; 47:7).
 - The Lord is good (vs. 5a). In contrast to the corruption of idolatry that sometimes required the sacrifices of children (e.g., King Ahaz, 2 Kings 16:3) and pagan deities that were evil, God is good. Pagan deities were often viewed as brutal and cruel, but not Jehovah.
 - He is a God of everlasting mercy (vs. 5b). "Mercy" has particular reference to the lovingkindness and goodness of God in keeping His covenants. God's abundant mercy and goodness was shown repeatedly as He kept His promise to bless all nations through Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; Acts 10:34-35).
 - He is a God of truth (vs. 5c). The word translated "truth" here is a word which means "firmness, fidelity, steadfastness and steadiness." The idea is that of strength, stability and dependability. The prophets of Baal upon Mt. Carmel found their god absent when they needed him (1 Kings 18:26-29). However, with God, not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge (Matthew 10:29). His eyes are always "over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12).

Psalm 103

- In contrast to the formal style and appeal for all men to worship found in Psalm 100, the 103rd psalm is personal and emotional. Written by David, it is one of the most beautiful psalms in all the book. David's heart was moved as he contemplated God and he shouts, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psalm 103:1).
- Has your soul ever felt such a stirring within? What would it take, what would God have to be or do in order to move you to such an emotional

outpouring? David quickly mentions five "benefits" of serving God that he dared not forget.

- He pardons iniquities (vs. 3a). Are we not thankful that "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (vs. 10). "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (vs. 12).
- He heals our diseases (vs. 3b). God has power over sickness and disease. When Israel was poised to enter Canaan God promised that, if they would listen to Him, He would bless them and remove from their midst all sickness (Deuteronomy 7:12-15). He also warned that, if they disobeyed, they would suffer from many miserable and chronic sicknesses (Deuteronomy 28:58-60). When Jesus came into the world He came "preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23). "Diseases" may be sicknesses; they may also be a metaphor for adversities.
- He redeems our lives (vs. 4a). Perhaps this is a reference to the many times that God had saved David's life from the hands of his enemies (cf. 1 Samuel 18:10-11; Psalm 18). Jesus taught His disciples to pray that they be delivered from evil for our Father is the only one with such magnificent power (Matthew 6:13). God saves lives. He saves lives from physical death. He saves lives from the ruin of sin.
- He crowns with lovingkindness (vs. 4b). Crown is from a word which means "to surround," the idea being that God both awards and surrounds man with lovingkindness. Lovingkindness is a beautiful, all-encompassing word for God's love, goodness, kindness, mercy and grace. Please paint this mental picture indelibly in your mind: Man, alone, in a hostile world with enemies at every step. Yet there is something that protects this man from evil. He is surrounded by God's lovingkindness. The person in your mental picture is you! Would you not agree that this calls for you to praise God?
- He satisfies your years with good things (vs. 5a). James proclaimed that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights ..." (James 1:17). "Count your many blessings; name them one by one" and you will see what God has done in your life and be moved to praise and adore Him. The picture some often paint of God as spiteful and anxious to destroy men at the slightest provocation is a lie. God will judge the evildoer, but His predisposition is to compassion and grace (vs. 8), especially to those who "remember His commandments to do them" (vs. 18; cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

- Of all the problems in churches and individuals today, the lack of enthusiastic, sincere praise may be the most telling. It is an insult to God and damages us spiritually in so many ways. Within itself, it is a manifest symptom of spiritual weakness and deadness.

Psalm 145

- Warren Wiersbe in his essay on Psalm 145 made this observation, "Some Christians praise the Lord and some do not. Perhaps the difference is this: the believers who praise the Lord have their eyes of faith fixed on Him while the silent saints look only at themselves. When God is the center of your life, you can praise Him every day, because you will always find blessings no matter how difficult your circumstances. To a praising saint, the circumstances of life are a window through which he sees God. To a complaining saint, these same circumstances are only a mirror in which he sees himself. That is why he complains" (*Meet Yourself In The Psalms*, p. 12-13).
- There are, no doubt, other factors that contribute to lack of praise among God's people. One is tempted to view Wiersbe's judgment to be a little harsh. Is he right? Is our failure to properly praise God rooted in a greater failure of not having Him rule at the core of our lives?
- Psalm 145 begins a series of six psalms, the last of the book, that are pure psalms of praise. This special concluding section follows five songs of prayer (140-144). Prayer and praise ought always to go together. Notice that there are no requests and no confessions of sin in Psalm 145. It is pure praise. Let us follow the same pattern we have used in studying the two previous psalms by examining what motivated the psalmist to praise God. In this psalm, we find the sweet singer of Israel caught up in four different aspects of God's person and work.
 - The greatness of God (vss. 3-6). To the psalmist, God's greatness was seen in His "works" or "mighty acts" (vs. 4). The history of the world and of the people of Israel is a record of the mighty acts of God: the creation account (Genesis 1-2); the flood (Genesis 6); the call of Abraham (Genesis 12); the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12-15); the wonders in the wilderness (Numbers 10-15); and the crossing of the Jordan and conquest of Canaan (Joshua). So wonderful were these acts that David found it a faith-building exercise to meditate upon them. These mighty acts were repeated in praise from one generation to another (vs. 4). So compelling was the evidence of God's greatness that it turned David into an evangelist (vs. 7). Will it do the same for you?
 - The goodness of God (vss. 7-10). When God gives He does not give sparingly, He gives abundantly (vs. 7). In this psalm, David celebrated the generosity of God. Furthermore, God's goodness comes

from His grace and mercy; the willingness to love the unlovable and help the helpless (vs. 8). The goodness of God is universal; it is experienced by all as He "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). How do you celebrate the goodness of God?

- The government of God (vss. 11-13). The term kingdom is used in different senses in the Bible. Among Christians we most often use the term in its special sense having reference to the church or body of Christ which was established on the first day of Pentecost following the resurrection of our Lord as recorded in Acts 2. However, there is another, more general sense in which the term kingdom is used: God's righteous rule in the world. It is in this sense that the Lord was King over His kingdom in David's day. As David observed world affairs He understood that God alone was Sovereign and that His rule would be an everlasting rule. In times of national and world crisis the child of God needs to remember that God is still on His throne, "that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 4:25). Knowing that God was in control brought comfort and security to David's heart and praises to God from his lips.
- The grace of God (vss. 14-20). It is interesting to see how David balances the different attributes of God in this psalm. He opened extolling the greatness of God, and then turned to the goodness of God. Now we move from God's sovereign government to His sovereign grace! He is the great God on His throne, yet He is a God who is near us, concerned about our needs. Isaiah caught this same wonderful balance (Isaiah 57:15).
- Our worship must be balanced. If we only exalt God, and extol His greatness and holiness, we may isolate Him from man and his needs. On the other hand, if we fail to exalt Him and recognize that He is "high and holy," we will be prone to bring Him down to our level and treat Him with undue familiarity. Note that David saw God as gracious to: (1) those who fall (vs. 14); (2) those who hunger (vss. 15-17; cf. Matthew 5:6); (3) those who pray (vss. 18-19); and, (4) those who love Him (vss. 20-21).
- David opened this psalm with personal praise ("I will extol thee"), but he closed it by proclaiming, "all flesh will bless His holy name." We have to recognize, as did David, that it is a thrilling privilege to use our voices in praise to the God of heaven.

Conclusion

- It is true that we do not live under the Mosaical system under which the psalmists lived and died. However, the principle of praise is timeless,

the command to praise is clear, but the absence of praise is often obvious.

- If, as I perceive, there is a lack of praise among Christians of our time, why is it so? Is there no desire to praise? Is there no real appreciation in our heart for God and what He has done? Is there no exalted view of God in our lives? It is my settled conviction that our praise and our zeal to worship will be in accordance with and proportionate to our view of God. Where do we go from here?