

“Praise, The Heart Throb” (Psalm 107:8)

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*Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works [KJ]
Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, and his wonderful works [NRSV]
Let these thank Yahweh for his love, for his marvels on behalf of men [JB]
They must thank the Lord for his constant love, for the wonderful things he did [GN]*

This Psalm has a special appeal. It has a touch of nostalgia carried over from the grand old days of Israel. Such appeals for praise have been made glorious because of the great workings of God. Psalm 107 begins the fifth and last book of the Psalter and focuses on the wonderful story of redemption. Redemption is described in something other than a mere personal salvation but in terms of deliverance from peril for all God’s people. The Psalm is set forth in four strophes in which redemption is illustrated variously.

We look at this first in terms of homelessness. Those who had been destitute and had wandered in the wilderness were led to a city of habitation as a redeemed people. Secondly, those who had known the bondage of slavery were brought to new freedom by the mercy of the Lord. In the third strophe those who had been afflicted were promised healing; and in the fourth and last, the storm tossed people of Israel rejoiced because they had been brought to a God-given haven. Each strophe considers a tragedy and provides God’s solution after which follows the plea: *Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men.*

Some of you will remember the words of Sir Winston Churchill that encouraged his nation on to victory in the midst of terrible set-backs in WW II. He challenged Britons to rise up to their *finest hour*. And because of resolution, heroism and sacrifices, Britain was saved. That sort of encouragement has been present in every century of the Christian Church yet it is interesting that repeatedly on four occasions in this Psalm there is the cry of the psalmist, *Oh that they would praise the Lord*. Why such a recurrence of appeal? What is it that makes praise such a relentless necessity? Why is it so important? For those who are mature in Christ and walk with the Lord little explanation is needed. But for others an answer can be spiritually helpful.

Praise is important because it is an evidence of the presence of God in us.

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so who he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy (Ps 107:2).

Men and women who have come to Christ and who have known His redeeming power discover a praise which bursts forth in spontaneity at the moment of conversion. The redeemed do rejoice.

The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore ... Praise the Lord (Ps 115:17-18)

As we come to know Christ and our relationship with Him has the evidence of victory, praise is continuous. But what of other times when our spiritual lives are lustreless? I think that nearly every Christian has had what we call a “dry time” in the faith journey. Most of the great teachers of Christianity have spoke or written of that time in their lives.

I know it happened to me. But we know that the Spirit of God is working in us when for reasons beyond our understanding we return to God and join with others in worship and praise. Some have expressed the fact that their church life has been silent for years, but one day it is impossible for them to keep silent. God helps us to discover him as we discover ourselves and when we do this we have to praise God.

The Psalmist said that praise was also an *expression of God's provision*. Whether in exile or in Israel, God's people discovered the Lord to be the God of all resources.

They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.

Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them. Then, they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distress, that they might go to a city of habitation. (Ps., 107: 4-5)

The provision of God's supply became the subject of their songs of praise. When we have exhausted our capacities then God comes with His supply. It is then that our gratitude turns to praise.

I am sure we have all had the experience of how difficulties have been overcome and our only exclamation is, *God, or an angel was looking over me!* We can think of stories of how we made it to pay day; how the car wouldn't start but did on the 'one more try.' How many times we have heard about the angel of mercy that brought a gallon of gas to the middle of no where; how the car wouldn't stop but how an accident was avoided; how the exam was terrible but came out a great pass; how the doctor had given 'last rights' leaving someone without hope, but they lived for years after. Some of you know of a man through our church who was discontinued all heroic efforts in September 2002, and the doctors and his family cannot understand how it is he is still alive today. There are many, many such stories. God does provide and so we too must join with the Psalmist: *Oh that everyone would praise the Lord for his goodness to us, for his mercy, for his love.* Again, praise is an essential in the very proclamation of the Gospel. *They must praise the Lord* (Ps. 107:8), while Psalm 50:23, states: *Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.* Praise is important as a statement of His grace to the believing Church as well as an appeal to an unsaved world.

Believers need to hear the word of Praise as well as to share it. It is essential as an encouragement to believers. Some may be lonely, some may be down in their spirit, some may feel lost or forlorn. These need to hear an encouraging word from the Lord. And our praise is just that. Several years ago a very close friend of mine became a widow. During her time of grieving she kept her faith and read her devotions daily. One day the Word for the Day was, *I will take care of you.* From that day on she knew that everything would work out and that she would be OK. There are several passages from where this may be translated literally, but what a wonderful ability to connect with the assurance from God. As we greet one another, how many times in my own life it has been essential for me to know that there are people around me who are praying with and for me as I work out a problem. And then there is the praise that we share in our corporate worship as we come together, one voice to sing a hymn can often be nice but a congregation of God's people make a much louder and shared sound.

One requirement in the, *Manual of Operations*, for the British navy is that, in battle, no discouraging word is to be given. Praise is important even when at war. But the word of praise is also an Evangel to the unbelievers:

He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God; many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. (Ps. 40:3).

Writers, playwrights, philosophers and such have discovered the dominant mood of our time to be that of despair. After a series of world wars and terrorists, unemployment, starvation, financial and economic uncertainty, pessimism prevails just about everywhere around the world. Youth in numbers as never known before commit suicide, adults running away from themselves behind alcohol and drugs. This is a time for God's people to lift the voice of praise and a song of joy.

Some of us have forgotten that Paul and Silas were at the midnight of their lives as the clock approached midnight. They were in prison awaiting sentencing or execution. It was at midnight when they prayed and sang hymns in that Philippian jail. Acts 16:25 says that the prisoners heard them, but Scripture never records another exciting fact: at some crescendo in their song, God joined in with their singing with the tympanic roll of an earthquake. The jail doors were opened, the shackles undone, the prisoners were released and the jailer was saved! *Oh that the people would praise the Lord for His goodness!*

Praise is essential in the proclamation of the Gospel, it has power in it. Somehow praise helps the gospel to move forward. It is almost as if it were a sacrifice offered on an altar which in some way secured divine favour.

Let them sacrifice the sacrifice of thanksgiving and declare his works with rejoicing (Ps. 107: 22).

Strange what praise can do. God does the impossible when He is praised. Perhaps it is because prayer is the highest expression of our faith, especially as we praise Him in the midst of the impossible. I was preaching a mid week series a few years ago and one night I preached on I Thessalonians 5:18, *In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* In everything, give thanks. In the sermon I told of a family known to me when I was younger were the father and daughter had a serious run in. She went off and became a dancer in one of the more famous clubs in Los Angeles. Shortly after her father died. The mother was shattered but she didn't let go of her faith. She came to worship and Bible Study faithfully, declaring that out of all the darkness that God would show forth a light. In her prayer she thanked God for the birth of her only daughter, her life, the happiness that she had given to the family and she prayed that she would come back to know the Lord and get out of the go-go life, the porn magazines and the California parties. Her prayer was answered. A young man met her one night and shared his love of Christ with her. They came home to Ontario, she married and made a lovely home just down the street from her mother. At the close of the service a man and his wife came up to me and told me about their daughter who had run away. They asked if I really believed that prayer could help, and we prayed, and others on their way out stopped and returned to join us in prayer. Eight days later they came to me to let me know that their daughter whom they had not heard from for over two years and they did not know where she was, had telephoned and asked if they would forgive her and if they might let her come home. I do not believe that this was a coincidence. I believe that it was an answer to sincere, humble prayer. These are not story book stories or something from a movie. These are stories of real people with real lives with whom I have had the honour and privilege to be present with as their pastor.

I do not profess for one moment to understand the working of God. All I know is that God desires people to praise Him and he does answer prayer. We must remember also that heavenly requirements have earthly dimensions. What we do in our relationship with God is meant to affect how we relate to one another. We need to praise and

encourage each other. Every one of us needs it. Praise is imperative for our own spiritual advancement. It is also valuable, that over and over throughout Scripture we are told to give that word of encouragement, admonition and inspiration. Praise is meant to be the heart throb of the believer. No wonder the psalmist cried out: *Oh that people would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of them!* Amen