

## 20260208 Prayer as Praise – Joe

Last week Pastor Bijoy preached about prayer, specifically, being able to bring your pain to God, praying earnestly through tough times, even when you don't seem to be getting an answer, and how that is a sign of spiritual maturity. Today, we're talking about a different aspect of prayer, we're talking about praising the Lord in our prayers, and how that can improve our relationship with the Lord.

To do this, we're going to be looking at the man after God's own heart, David. Through David's life we see that while he made mistakes, he had an incredibly strong relationship with the Lord. He wrote endlessly about the goodness of God, about his great deeds and wonderful works, he cried out to God in times of need, and through the strength of his relationship, he came to revelations about God's character that would've been unheard of at the time, which we can see in Psalms 51.

David, particularly how he speaks to God in the Psalms, provides for us a fantastic blueprint to follow, a model if you will. We can follow along, or take insight from this model, to improve the quality of our spiritual lives, to grow in our love for the Lord, and also our maturity as followers of Christ.

I for one love praising the Lord. Not just through song, not just through praise and worship on a Sunday morning, but I love praising the Lord in my quiet times, praising Him on the way to work, praising Him whenever something goes right, and, through conscious effort, praising Him when things go wrong.

You see, what I've found when I praise the Lord, is that my relationship with Him has improved dramatically. Not only that, but the more I praise the Lord, the more conscious effort I put into finding words to describe how wonderful He is, the better I get at doing it. The better I get at doing it, the more joy I feel, and this carries over into other aspects of my spiritual life. While I still have particular issues, specifically around certain wonderful people driving their cars in particular ways, I have overall found that praising the Lord has helped me become a stronger Christian.

Earlier I said the Book of psalms is a blueprint, or a model of what we ought to do. There are numerous examples in the Psalms of praising the Lord, of glorifying Him for His attributes. We're going to look at chunks of Psalm 145, and see what they can teach us

The Psalm opens with verses 1 and 2 stating:

1 I will [\[a\]](#)extol You, my God, O King;

And I will bless Your name forever and ever.

2 Every day I will bless You,

And I will praise Your name forever and ever.

In different translations the wording is slightly different, extol may be exalt, bless might be praise, praise might be extol, so on and so forth, but I've used the NKJV here for a particular reason, which is for the use of bless.

You see when Spurgeon was talking on this topic, he said the use of bless in this passage is not merely to serve as a synonym for praise, but rather to show the deeply personal nature of praising the Lord.

“To bless God is to praise him with a personal affection for him, and a wishing well to him; this is a growingly easy exercise as we advance in experience and grow in grace.” (Spurgeon)

Spurgeon links the ease with which we praise the Lord directly to our own spiritual maturity. In other words, the easier it is for us to praise the Lord with personal affection, the more mature we have become as Christians.

### **But what is praise?**

In order to discuss what praise is, we must expand our horizons,

Praise and worship are most often mentioned in tandem, “we have praise and worship this Sunday morning”, “come to our church for an evening of praise and worship”. Almost always, praise and worship refer to singing, to music, and while that is a very valid way to praise and worship the Lord, it is not the only way.

It was quite a while ago, but Pastor Bijoy preached a sermon on worship, and in that sermon, he stated that worship is more than just singing songs on a Sunday morning, but that worship was a lifestyle. So too is there more to the idea of praise than just singing songs about how great God is.

Whereas worship can be lived, expressed wordlessly, praise is very much a verbal activity.

Returning to Psalm 145, verses 4-6 state:

- 4 One generation commends your works to another;  
they tell of your mighty acts.
- 5 They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—  
and I will meditate on your wonderful works. [\[b\]](#)
- 6 They tell of the power of your awesome works—  
and I will proclaim your great deeds.

To praise is to speak. Whether that be to other people, telling them how great the Lord is, or to God himself directly, telling Him how much we love and adore Him. We largely express praise through our mouths, through our words.

Praise is also a requirement. The Bible is full of scriptures instructing us to praise, David and the psalmists do numerous times, Psalm 150:6 “let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

We also find this instruction in the New Testament, Paul, in writing to the church in Rome, explaining that the Gospel is for all, not just the Jews, quotes from Psalm 117. Romans 15:11 “Praise the Lord, all you gentiles”

The Bible is full of instruction to praise God, and how could we not? When we think of what He has done for us, how He has saved us from sin and death, how He brings us up out of our misery, out of the low places, and makes us soar on eagle’s wings. We do not praise the Lord simply because the Bible tells us to, but because no other response would be befitting of Him.

In simplest terms, we offer our praise as a way to thank the Lord for all he has done for us. In more complicated terms, we offer praise as an expression of admiration, of reverence, of love.

David's description of what praise is throughout the Psalm is clear, even still, the ending of the Psalm reiterates this:

21 My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD,  
And all flesh shall bless His holy name  
Forever and ever.

If there was any doubt as to what kind of praise David was referring to, we need look no further than the end of Psalm 145, "my mouth shall speak" while praise can look like many things, it is most important that we praise him with our words, that we verbally speak these praises. But what do we say?

Luckily the Psalms help us in that regard as well, its not just instructions to praise the Lord that we can find in Psalm 145, but also what to praise him for.

Verses 3 - 20 give us a picture of what we should praise him for. A lot of it is written in the tone of all creation praising God, of loudly proclaiming His works, His faithfulness, and His goodness, which we ought to do, because what else would be befitting of Him? But we can still use this in our personal prayer lives as things to praise Him for. We should be taking praise of His goodness out into the world, telling people about it, but we can also use this as a model of what we should praise Him for in our prayer time.

There are two key ideas of praise that I want to discuss this morning, praise as emotional expression, and praise as conscious thought. Both are correct ways of praising the Lord, and both are equally important.

### **Praise as emotional expression**

Praise is often, and rightly so, linked to emotional expression. Stepping out of the Biblical context for the moment, praise is a common occurrence in our daily lives. We praise what we enjoy, you read a good book, you praise it, you tell others how amazing it is. You find a beautiful art piece, you praise it, you taste good food, you praise it. Food is a particularly common one I think, Pastor Bijoy has come up to this pulpit numerous times and espoused praises of chinese braised beef noodles.

I believe C.S. Lewis said it best when he said, in his book Reflections on the Psalms, that praise itself completes the joy of experiencing anything we find to be worth praise.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because *the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation*. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed.(CS Lewis)

When we are overcome with joy, expressing our praises to God adds on to that joy. By praising God, we complete our joy, we experience it in fullness.

Turning again to Psalm 145, there's certainly endless material to praise Him about.

David writes:

8 The LORD *is* gracious and full of compassion,  
Slow to anger and great in mercy.

9 The LORD *is* good to all,  
And His tender mercies *are* over all His works.

13 Your kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom,  
And Your dominion *endures* throughout all <sup>the</sup> generations.

14 The LORD upholds all who fall,  
And raises up all *who are* bowed down.

15 The eyes of all look expectantly to You,  
And You give them their food in due season.

16 You open Your hand  
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

He tells us of this all powerful God, a God full of goodness and compassion, a God who is faithful to us, a God who provides for our needs at the proper time, who satisfies the desires of every living thing.

When we're in places where we can experience this firsthand, where we can come before our Lord in prayer and sincerely praise Him for all he's done for us, we find ourselves overflowing with joy, praise comes naturally to us, as if it were part of our very being.

Strong emotions of joy can lead us to very legitimate praise, looking back on what we've talked about at this moment, how could you not feel strong emotions? The danger, and unfortunate reality we find ourselves in is that sometimes we cater too much to drawing out this emotional response.

A criticism I've often heard of modern churches, and modern praise and worship music in general, is that it is designed to elicit an emotional response. Lights, smoke machines, backdrops, backing music, repetition, all of it, all meant to elicit an emotional response from us so that we feel like praising the Lord.

This is not a blanket statement, discussing this topic could be a sermon unto itself, but the idea is that the general understanding of praise is something very emotionally driven. This has led some individuals into a mindset that people need to feel like praising in order to come into that space of praise, we need to provide some emotional impetus in order to 'convince' everybody to praise the Lord.

First comes emotion, then comes praise.

However, this leads us into a problem. That problem of course, being that sometimes we may not feel like praising, sometimes we might not have the words.

### **Praise as careful thought**

David's instructions in psalm 145 remain unchanging, we are to praise the Lord daily, regardless of circumstance, regardless of how we feel, regardless of if we have the words.

So what do we do? We must praise the Lord, but we cant find the words. Maybe your circumstance is such that you don't feel like it, maybe you keep trying to praise the Lord, only to find yourself lost in the same repetitions, or lost for words entirely.

David gives us an answer in Psalm 145:5

<sup>5</sup> [c] I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty,  
And [d] on Your wondrous works.

It may just be two lines of text, but they are extremely profound. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. We can follow his example when coming before the Lord in prayer, if you struggle for words, think about all He's done for you, you will find them. If your circumstance is such that you couldn't possibly imagine praising the Lord, think about all he's done for you up until this point, think about how he promises to give us everything we need at the appointed time, David gives us plenty of reasons in the Psalms, we must only go looking.

14 The LORD upholds all who fall,  
And raises up all *who are* bowed down.  
15 The eyes of all look expectantly to You,  
And You give them their food in due season.  
16 You open Your hand  
And satisfy the desire of every living thing.

Praise is not just an emotional response, praise comes from deep meditation, from careful thought. This careful thought is extremely important, praise is not just about heart, but also about head.

I've heard this idea, that we must put conscious effort into how we praise the Lord, from many places. Most memorably from Michael Rhodes, an old testament lecturer at Carey Baptist that came to speak at youth camp 2 years ago. He was talking about how small children, toddlers, speak with a limited vocabulary, 21-25 words, and while they may be able to communicate their needs without issue, "me hungry", "me go potty", and it may even come across as cute and endearing, it's a lot less cute when that toddler is 20 years old and still speaks with that limited vocabulary.

So too goes for how we praise the Lord. It is an important mark of our spiritual maturity that we are able to praise the Lord more eloquently than when we first came to the faith, than when spiritually, we were toddlers.

If our praise is only as deep as our emotions, it will be as inconsistent as our emotions. However, if our praise comes from deeper within us, from our core beliefs about God, then it is as good as unshakeable.

Spurgeon puts it this way:

"It seems, then, dear friends, that David studied the character and doings of God, and thus praised him; knowledge should lead our song. The more we know of God the more acceptably shall we bless him through Jesus Christ."

The more we put conscious thought into praising the Lord, the better we get at it. Its a sign of maturity.

If we take this even further, into what CS Lewis had to say, the more we praise the Lord, the more we feel like praising Him. Praise is the completion of joy, praising the Lord causes us to feel joy, which in turn, gives us more reason to praise Him.

Sometimes, you won't feel like praising the Lord, just like what Pastor Bijoy shared last week, sometimes your circumstances may be so terrible that you don't think you could possibly bring yourself to praise the Lord.

When I was doing research for this sermon, I came across a story of a man who was a missionary to Cameroon. While there, his 1 year old son burned half of his body with boiling water. He was medevaced to Johannesburg, where they found his lungs had collapsed due to infections, and he had somehow caught COVID along the way, they tried a respirator, it didn't work, they tried a stronger one, it didn't work, so they hooked this 1 year old boy up to an ECMO machine, which is essentially an artificial heart and lungs.

While their boy was laying there, hooked up to this machine, the man and his wife found themselves praising the Lord for even the most simple things. Their circumstance was dire, there was only about a 50% recovery rate for patients hooked up to an ECMO machine, but they still found words, they still found reason to praise the Lord.

Thankfully, the boy survived, and the family has returned to the US where they live peacefully. Even still, in the retelling of this story, the man remarked that he praises the Lord now more than ever before.

Being able to praise the Lord, regardless of circumstance, is a mark of spiritual maturity, it is evidence of strong relationship with the Lord. How do we get there? By praising Him with conscious thought.

## **Conclusion**

Sometimes praise wells up from within us without need for prompt or for conscious thought. Sometimes we are so overcome with joy that we feel compelled to praise the Lord. And other times, we might not be, we might struggle to find the words, we may be so burdened by the weight of our circumstances that we feel as if we cannot find anything to praise Him for. However, we can, we must, still praise the Lord.

To borrow a quote from Spurgeon, he said "Whenever you look into David's Psalms, you may somewhere or another see yourselves...I think that I was never so low that I could not find that David was lower; and I never climbed so high that I could not find that David was up above me, ready to sing his song upon his stringed instrument, even as I could sing mine."

David's Psalms are a fantastic blueprint to follow, because he represents all of us. He experienced trials and tribulations, the lowest of lows, but also the highest of highs, and throughout it all, he found reason to praise the Lord.

So next time you're struggling with praising the Lord, next time you find yourself lost for words, unable to feel the joy necessary to praise the Lord, remember, praise doesn't have to come from emotional response, as long as you have knowledge of God and His goodness, you can find reason to praise Him, and as you praise Him, you will find the joy of the Lord.