

PRAISE

PART ONE: ACCESS TO GOD'S THRONE



In my talks last week I spoke about various gifts or sacrifices that God requires from us whenever we come into His presence. The particular sacrifice that I dealt with mainly was the sacrifice of thanksgiving. This week I'm going to deal with the next main sacrifice that follows on directly and naturally from the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and that is the *sacrifice of praise*.

This is one of the grandest and most glorious themes that we can ever be privileged to study. It runs like a golden thread throughout the whole Bible, from beginning to end. Praise is *eternal*. Its origin is in *heaven*. It's the ceaseless occupation of all the glorious and eternal beings who inhabit heaven and there enjoy the closest and most uninterrupted access to God Himself. *Uninterrupted access* calls for *uninterrupted praise*. Praise is also associated with our own planet earth since its beginning.

In Job chapter 38, God challenges Job with the question, ***"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth! When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"*** What a beautiful picture that is of the beginning of earth! It was *praise* that sent our planet first spinning on its celestial course, and it's the *responsibility* of God's people on this planet to see that praise *continues* to mark its course until heaven and earth are no more!

The first specific thing I want to say about praise today is that praise is the appropriate way that we relate to God as a King on His throne. We find this in Psalm 22 verse 3, where the psalmist says, ***"Yet thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel."*** (NAS) You see, God is *always* a King whether we acknowledge it or not. But when we as His people, offer Him our praises, then we provide Him with a throne which is appropriate for Him to sit upon. So when we praise God, He takes His place as a King upon the throne of our praises! It's our way of acknowledging His Kingship.

And then, combined with thanksgiving, praise gives us *access* to God. We see this in Psalm 100 verse 4, the psalmist says, ***"Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name."*** (NAS) We see there two degrees or phases of access.

1. Through God's gates
2. Through His courts.

The psalmist indicates that it's thanksgiving that brings us through the gates, but praise brings us into the courts!

This is also beautifully illustrated in a verse from Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 60 verse 18, where the prophet says to God's people, ***"Violence will not be heard again in your land, Nor devastation or destruction within your borders. But you will call your walls salvation, and your gates praise."*** (NAS) You see, God dwells in a land of perfect peace and tranquility. Not only is there no violence or destruction there, but not even the *sounds* of violence or destruction ever come into that land. That's the land of God's presence that He invites us into to share with Him. But notice the way of access, *all* the gates are praise! In other words, the only way into the place of God's presence and God's dwelling is through praise. The Scripture makes it plain elsewhere that we *cannot* have access *unless* we come through the gates, and here it tells us that the gates are praise. In other words, the *only* way of access into God's presence and God's dwelling is through praise. Without praise, we do *not have access*! Without thanksgiving and praise, we only can be just like the ten lepers of whom Luke speaks in his gospel. He says, ***"As Jesus was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"*** There they were, unfit for the Lord's presence, excluded by their leprosy, pitiful indeed! And Jesus had pity on them. But you see, they had no access. They had to stand at a distance and, unless we learn the lesson of coming to God with thanksgiving and praise, we never fare better than those lepers! We can stand at a distance and call out for mercy. And I suppose there are many people whose prayer life never gets much beyond that, repeated calls for mercy every time they're in desperate need of help. But that's not the kind of prayer life that God wants us to enjoy. He wants us to learn the lesson of access into His gates with thanksgiving and into His presence with praise. He bids us welcome in that city of perfect peace and tranquility, where violence and destruction are never heard. What a beautiful invitation! What a beautiful way of access! But remember, *all the gates are praise*! There's no other way into that city except the way of praise.

I've said that praise is the way we acknowledge God as King. Now I want to add that praise also makes God's people "queenly." There's a beautiful passage in Isaiah chapter 52 verses 1–2, which I believe is a word from God to His people at this time, ***"Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion."*** (NIV) That's a message to God's people. Too long we've groveled in the dust. We haven't realized our queenly dignity and destiny. We've been like *slaves* rather than like *ruling princes*, which is what God wants us to be. So God tells us to awake, to get up out of the dust, to shake ourselves, to loose ourselves from the bands on our neck, and to sit down enthroned and to put on the garments of splendor which are ours by right of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. What are these garments of splendor? Let me give you a few pictures from the Scriptures. Psalm 96 verses 6–9, ***"Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness..."*** That's one of the beautiful things that God asks us to put on when we come to Him, the splendor of his holiness!

And then again in Isaiah 61 and verse 3, we read what God will provide for those who grieve in Zion. The prophet says that God will bestow on them, ***“a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”*** Three beautiful things are mentioned there:

1. a crown of beauty
2. the oil of gladness
3. a garment of praise (which *completely excludes* the ‘spirit of despair’. This is God’s remedy against depression)

And in the same chapter of Isaiah, a little further on, Isaiah 61 verse 10, ***“I will rejoice greatly in the Lord, My soul will exalt in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”*** (NAS) Look at those beautiful adornments there! Garments of salvation, a robe of righteousness, a garland and jewels. All these are directly associated with our learning to come with the garment of praise.

There’s a picture in the middle of the book of Esther. A terrible decree had gone out for the destruction of God’s people. We see two different reactions: first, the reaction of Mordecai, then the reaction of Esther. Esther 4 verses 1–2, ***“When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it.”*** You see, that’s a principle. We cannot enter the king’s gate when we are wearing sackcloth.

Now let’s read about Esther in the next chapter, ***“On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king’s hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. Then the king asked, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.”*** (NIV) You see the contrast between Mordecai and Esther. Mordecai was wearing sackcloth, he couldn’t get inside the king’s gate. But Esther realized her queenly possession, put on her royal robes, went into the presence of the king and obtained mercy and redemption for her people. That, I believe, is a pattern for us today. God wants us to realize that we’re the *bride of Christ*. We’re *queenly*. We need to put on our royal robes, and not least of these is the *garment of praise*!

PART TWO: PURPOSE OF GOD'S BLESSING



In my introductory talk yesterday I pointed out that praise is eternal. It's the unceasing activity of all the glorious creatures who have the most direct access to God in heaven. Here on earth also, praise is the appointed way of access for us to God. The Bible pictures God as dwelling in a city of such perfect peace and tranquility that not even the *sounds* of violence can be heard there! But all the gates to this city are marked "praise." In other words, praise is the *only* way of access into the presence and the dwelling place of God. Praise is also the appropriate way that we relate to God as a King on His throne. Furthermore, when we do relate to God in this way, it confers royal dignity upon us also. One beautiful picture of this in the Bible is Queen Esther putting on her royal garments, going into the presence of King Ahasuerus, touching the tip of his extended golden scepter and being told that whatever she requested would be granted to her, even to an equal share in the kingdom. This is just how God as the King of all kings, will respond to us when we go into His presence adorned in the beauty of holiness and wearing our royal and splendid garment of praise.

Today I'm going to show you that praise is the *purpose* for which God blesses us. His blessings are designed to *call forth* praise from us. Praise is our appropriate response to God's blessings. This places praise in the category of *ends* rather than *means*. Let me explain this briefly. A means is not valuable in itself but only insofar as it enables us to achieve something else through it and beyond it. On the other hand, an end is something that is valuable in itself, even if it leads to nothing further beyond itself. So many of the things that we regularly do in the practice of religion are means, not ends. They are valuable only if they enable us to achieve something beyond them. In actual fact, it often happens in our religious activities that we get bogged down in a welter of means without even being aware of the ends that they are supposed to achieve, much less insuring that they do actually achieve those ends. However, praise does not belong to this category of means. Praise is an *end in itself*. It is supremely valuable for its own sake.

Let's look now at some of the Scriptures that present praise as an end in itself. First of all, we'll turn to a prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 106 verse 47, ***"Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen [or the nations], to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise.*** (KJV) I believe that's a prayer that's appropriate to the present situation

with God's people. I believe we're living in a time of restoration and regathering and reuniting, and God is saving His people and gathering His people back into their inheritance. But notice the *purpose* for which God is doing this, the response that God requires from us. He's doing it that we may give *thanks* unto His holy name and *triumph* in His praise. That word "triumph" is one of the key words of the Scripture. We need to understand a little about it. First of all, we need to understand that a triumph is not the *winning* of a battle, it's the celebration of a battle or of a war that has *already been won*. And in this context we need to see ourselves not as *fighting* the battle, but as entering into the victory that Christ has *already won for us*. This victory and the triumph are described in the New Testament in Colossians chapter 2:15. Speaking of what was accomplished through the death of Christ on the cross, Paul says this of God, **"Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."** You see the word "triumph" there. The death of Jesus was a victory that led to a triumph, and we're invited to share that triumph. By His death, Jesus conquered all the evil satanic forces, the powers and authorities, the whole satanic kingdom that had been set in array against us and was working for our destruction and ruin. The *only* one who could save us and help us was Jesus, and He came to our help through the cross. He defeated all those satanic powers, He made a public spectacle of them, and He triumphed over them by the cross.

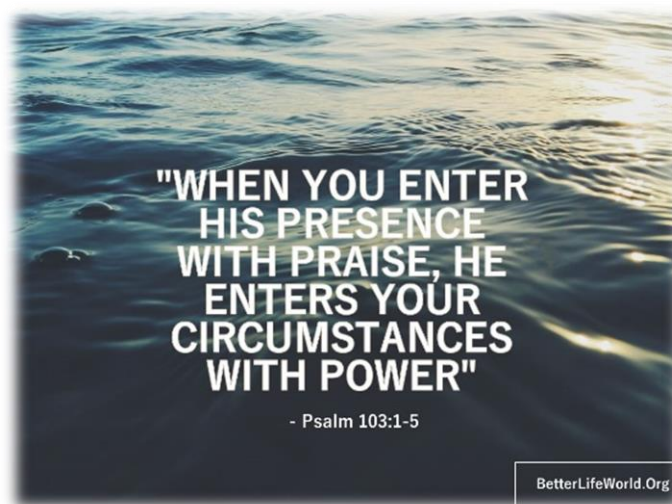
The triumph was familiar in the Roman civilization of Paul's day. It was the highest honor that the Senate of Rome could vote a victorious Roman general. It went something like this: After the Senate had voted a triumph to this general, on a specific day he was placed in a special chariot drawn by a white horse and the chariot drove him in triumph through the streets of Rome. The people of Rome lined the streets on either side and applauded as he went past in the chariot. Behind him there followed a whole train of people and creatures that indicated the nature of his victory, kings and rulers and generals that he had taken captive, many, many ranks of prisoners of war in manacles and chains, and even sometimes wild animals from the territories that the general's conquests had added to the Roman Empire. Sometimes it would be a tiger or some animal that the Roman people were not familiar with. All these were the *evidences* of his *victory*, the *manifestation* of his *triumph*. So that's how Jesus dealt with Satan at the cross. He not merely conquered him but He took all those evil powers and authorities captive, and then He led them in visible defeat behind His chariot.

Now, where do we fit in in this picture? Are we just on the sidewalk applauding? No, that's not God's purpose. Let's look at what Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 14. The King James Version goes like this, **"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place."** The New International Version says this, **"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ, and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him."** You see where we're supposed to be? Not being led in chains behind the chariot, not even standing on the sidewalk and applauding. But where are we to be? *In* the chariot *sharing* Christ's triumph. How do we get into the chariot? The answer is we triumph in His *praise*. It's when we *praise* Him that we're lifted up above the level of the sidewalk and we find ourselves *right there* in the chariot with Christ, sharing His glorious eternal victory over all the forces of evil. **"Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphant procession in Christ."** But He does it only when we learn to praise Him aright.

I have said that praise is an end, not a means. It's something that's desirable for its own sake, not just because it leads to something else. Here's another Scripture that brings out this fact about praise. It's one of the psalms of David, Psalm 30 verses 11–12. David says this, ***"Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever."*** (KJV) Notice, David has experienced the glorious deliverance of the Lord, just as you and I have done, through what Christ has done on our behalf. And David realized, by the revelation of the Holy Spirit, the *purpose* for which the Lord had done this for him. The Lord had put off his sackcloth, girded him with gladness, the Lord had turned his mourning into dancing. What was the response that the Lord required from David? David says it very clearly, ***"To the end that.. (that's the purpose) "to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent..."*** We have *no right* to be silent when we celebrate the victories that Christ has won on our behalf. The *only appropriate response is praise!* You noticed that David says, *"My glory may sing praise to thee..."* What does he mean by "my glory"? The answer is, he means his 'tongue'. Let me show you how Scripture comments on this. In Psalm 16 verse 9, another psalm of David, David says, ***"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope."*** (KJV) Now Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, quoted this verse in Acts chapter 2 verse 26, but this is how he quoted it, ***"Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope..."*** (KJV) You notice that where the psalmist in the Old Testament says "my glory," Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, offers us the divine commentary on this. He says, "my tongue." What does that tell us? It tells us that our tongue is our glory. You say, "Well, why is my tongue my glory?" And I'll tell you, because your tongue and my tongue was placed in our mouths for *one supreme purpose*. You know what that was? To give *glory to God!* How do we give glory to God? Well, that's what David said, ***"to the end that my glory may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent."***

Bear that in mind, the supreme purpose of the human tongue is to give glory to God. To praise Him. To worship Him. To acknowledge Him. In fact, every use of our tongues that does not glorify God is a misuse! Remember that, will you? Your tongue is your glory. It becomes your glory in effect, in reality, when you use it to praise God.

PART THREE: A WAY OF DELIVERANCE



In my previous talks this week I've been dealing with the following aspects of praise:

1. First of all, praise is *eternal*. It's the *unceasing activity* of all the glorious creatures who have the most direct access to God in heaven.
2. For us on earth, praise is our only way of access into the presence and dwelling place of God.
3. Praise is the appropriate way that we relate to God as a King on His throne. It's a royal garment that makes us fit for His presence.
4. Praise is the *purpose* for which God blesses us. His blessings are designed to call forth praise from us. Thus praise is an *end in itself*, not just a means to some other end.

Today I'm going to deal with another vitally important aspect of praise, *praise as a way of deliverance*. By this I mean that when we find ourselves in some critical or desperate situation, praise opens the way for God to intervene on our behalf and work out our deliverance, often on a level *far higher* than anything we could ever achieve merely by our own efforts. This general principle is stated in Psalm 50 verse 23. I'm going to read two different versions of this verse, which bring out different aspects of the truth. First of all, the King James, **"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me [that's God speaking] and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.** Now the New International Version of the same verse, **"He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God."** I think that's very significant, that alternative translation. From my understanding of the Hebrew language, I would say each is a legitimate translation. But you see that the one who offers praise prepares the way that God may show him His salvation. In other words, praise opens the way for God to intervene supernaturally on our behalf. God's salvation there means His deliverance, His help. When we're in desperate need and trouble, we don't

have the answer to our own problems, then, if we praise God in faith, our praise opens the way for God to intervene.

There's a very good example of this in the Old Testament in 2 Chronicles chapter 20, a record of the reign of King Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. At a certain point in his reign, King Jehoshaphat was informed that a very large alien invading army was on its way against him from the southeast, an army of Ammonites and Moabites and people from Mt. Seir, all of them coming with the intention of invading and destroying the kingdom of Judah. King Jehoshaphat realized that he didn't have the military means in the natural to withstand this invading army. And so, he turned to God, he turned to a supernatural realm. He did various things, he proclaimed a fast, he called God's people together for prayer, then he led the people in prayer and, after he had prayed, a supernatural utterance was given through one of the Levites, an utterance in prophecy in which God revealed that He'd heard the prayer and that He was going to intervene on behalf of His people Judah, and that they would not need to fight. So when the people heard this beautiful prophecy it says, ***"They bowed their heads and worshiped..."*** Now let's see what Jehoshaphat did next. I'm going to read verses 21 through 26, ***"After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying, "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever." As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated.*** Notice that very significant phrase, *"as the men of Judah began to sing and praise, the Lord intervened against the enemies."* This is what happened, ***"The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Mount Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When the men of Judah came to the place that overlooks the desert and looked toward the vast army, they saw only dead bodies lying on the ground; no one had escaped. So Jehoshaphat and his men went to carry off their plunder, and they found among them a great quantity of equipment and clothing and also articles of value, more than they could take away. There was so much plunder that it took three days to collect it. On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah [Beracah is the Hebrew word for "blessing"], where they praised the LORD. This is why it is called the Valley of Beracah [or "blessing"] to this day"***

See how God intervened! Jehoshaphat and his people didn't have the military means, they didn't have the natural power. But when they received the message of encouragement through prophecy and then set aside men simply to sing and to praise the Lord, when the Lord *heard their praises* He Himself intervened against their enemies, put division and enmity amongst the enemies so that they actually destroyed themselves. And true to the prophecy, the men of Judah didn't even have to fight. When they arrived where the battle was to have taken place, their enemies were already dead bodies lying on the ground. All they had to do was to gather the spoil and there was so much spoil that it took three days to gather it. That's a beautiful picture of how, when we do not have the answer to a situation, when we're confronted by crisis, something too big for us to handle, one of the wisest things we can do is simply to turn away from the crisis and the situation to the Lord, and in faith begin to *praise* Him, because when we praise the Lord it opens the way for His *miraculous intervention on our behalf*. If we honor the Lord in our praise, *the Lord takes care of our problem!*

I've been saying that praise offered in faith when we're faced with a critical situation opens the way for God to intervene supernaturally on our behalf. I gave you an example from the Old Testament from the story of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. Now I want to give you another example from the New Testament, the story of Paul and Silas in the city of Philippi. You probably remember that Paul and Silas had arrived there for the first time to preach the gospel in the city of Europe and things had been going quite well and then Paul got involved with this girl with a spirit of fortune telling, and he cast the evil spirit of fortune telling out of the girl, and the whole city just broke into an uproar. And for no real, adequate reason, Paul and Silas were treated as criminals, the magistrates had them severely flogged and then put them in prison. Now, here's how the story goes on from there, Acts chapter 16 verses 23–30, ***"After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped..."*** You need to understand that the jailer always had to answer with his own life for the safety of his prisoners. If the prisoners escaped, he was put to death, so he'd rather put himself to death than wait to be executed by the Roman authorities. However, Paul had pity on that jailer, ***"...but Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We're all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Men, what must I do to be saved?"*** Isn't that a beautiful picture of God's supernatural intervention on behalf of servants of His who'd learned the secret of praise? There Paul and Silas were, their backs bleeding, in the maximum security jail, their feet in the stocks apparently a hopeless situation. But they had the faith and the courage just to praise God. Nothing in their natural situation had changed but it says, ***"They praised and sang hymns to God."*** It says, ***"The other prisoners were listening to them."*** That always appeals to me, that statement! I'm sure that those prisoners had never heard anything like that before in that prison, and they just didn't know what kind of persons they had there in that maximum security jail. In fact, I believe it would be surprising enough in any prison today if the prisoners in the maximum security jail were heard singing hymns and praising God! You might say, "Well, what a foolish thing to do!" but the Bible says the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Out of that foolishness came a mighty intervention of God. There was an earthquake. *God* sent the earthquake! All the doors were opened, all the prisoners' bonds were loosed, and the jailer came to the point of conviction where he wanted to know how he too could have this kind of experience! That's a beautiful picture but remember one thing, *praise is a sacrifice!* Hebrews 13:15, ***"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise the fruit of lips that confess his name."*** In other words, praise is an act of obedience arising from the will, not from feelings or circumstances. I'm sure that Paul and Silas didn't *feel* like praising the Lord but they offered the sacrifice of praise.

PART FOUR - A WEAPON OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE



In my talk yesterday I spoke about praise as a way of deliverance. I explained that when we find ourselves in some critical or desperate situation, praise opens the way for God to intervene on our behalf and work out our deliverance, often on a level far higher than anything we could ever achieve merely by our own efforts. One example I gave of this was Paul and Silas in the jail in Philippi, their backs bleeding, their feet fastened in the stocks. As they sang praises to God at midnight, the darkest hour, God intervened on their behalf, dramatically and supernaturally, with an earthquake that rocked the prison, opened all the doors, set all the prisoners free and brought the jailer to the place where he cried out for salvation! It was the *praises* of Paul and Silas that prepared the way for this supernatural intervention of God on their behalf. This incident also brings out the fact that *praise is a sacrifice*, an act of *obedience* arising from *the will*, not from feelings or circumstances. I'm sure that Paul and Silas didn't *feel* like praising God but they offered God their praise as a sacrifice.

Today I'm going to take this concept of praise one step further. I'm going to speak about praise as a *weapon of spiritual warfare*. I used the phrase "one step further" to bring out an important difference. When we use the word "deliverance," our posture is essentially defensive. We need *help* to get us *out* of something. But when we use the word "weapon," our posture is more aggressive. We are thinking in terms of *attacking* an enemy. The objective that we have in mind is not merely deliverance, it is *victory*. It is from this positive, aggressive point of view that I'm going to approach the theme of praise in my talk today. Of course, the use of the word "weapon" in connection with praise presupposes a *war*. It presupposes that as Christians, we are involved in a war and this is *indeed the truth*. It's made plain in many different passages of Scripture. We don't really have a *choice* about this as Christians. If we are Christians, we're involved in the war. So we better know what the war is about and the weapons that God has provided us. Paul describes this in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 10–12, where he's writing to Christians, and he says, **"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."** Notice the word "armor" again reinforces the picture of war. Then in the next verse, verse 12, Paul tells us the kind of forces that are pitted against us in this war, **"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood..."** One of the other translations says *"persons with bodies."* We're not fighting persons with bodies, it's not a natural warfare against flesh and blood. Whom are we fighting then? Paul goes on, **"...against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly**

realms." We don't have time in this talk today to analyze in detail the nature of Satan's kingdom and its structure. But we notice that a *highly organized kingdom* of evil spiritual beings with their headquarters in the heavenlies is *arrayed against us*, and we have to acknowledge this situation and take the appropriate action. One of the provisions that God has made for us in this warfare is the *weapon of praise*. What does praise do for us in this war? Let's look at a passage in Psalm 8 verse, the psalmist David says this, **"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou, O LORD, ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightiest still the enemy and the avenger."** We see here that it's speaking of God's enemies and provision that God has made for us to deal with these enemies; and in particular, the psalmist speaks of one specific enemy, *the enemy*, and *the avenger*. That, I believe, is Satan. So here is a provision of God, strength that God has provided for us to deal with our enemy Satan, and with that whole evil spiritual kingdom that's opposed to us. But what *is* this strength? This is one of those places where Scripture comments on itself, for in the New Testament in Matthew chapter 21 verses 15–16, Jesus Himself quotes this verse from Psalm 8:2, but He just changes one or two words. The scene is Jesus in the temple, teaching, performing miracles, the children running to and fro, excited, crying, *"Hosanna to the Son of David,"* the religious leaders protesting and asking Jesus to silence the children. Here's what Jesus says, **"But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant, and said to Him, 'Do You hear what these are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast [perfected] praise for Thyself?'"** (NAS) You see, Jesus was quoting Psalm 8 verse 2, but where the psalmist said, *"Thou hast ordained strength,"* Jesus said, *"Thou hast perfected [or prepared] praise."* What does that tell us? Something vitally important, that the strength which God has ordained for His people is *perfect praise*. And when perfect praise comes out of our lips, we *silence our adversary the devil!* There are some points to notice there that are very significant. First of all, the religious leaders were upset by this praise. I'm afraid that's sometimes true today. Some people in churches don't understand the importance of loudly and vocally and continuously praising God, it upsets them. Then Jesus spoke about "babes." Babes, I understand to mean those who depend least on natural strength or reason. At one point Jesus spoke of His own disciples as *babes*. He said to the Father, **"I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent and hast revealed them unto babes..."** So babes are those who depend least on natural strength or reason. And notice that this is all related to God's adversaries and that the result of this perfect praise is to *silence the enemy and the avenger*. So we see that praise is a *weapon* that we can use against Satan and his kingdom, a weapon to silence Satan. I've said that praise is a weapon that God has given us to silence Satan. You might ask, "Why do we need to silence Satan?" Let me give you a simple answer which is taken from Revelation 12:10. In this verse Satan is described as **"the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night."** It's angels who are speaking, and when angels speak of 'our brothers', they mean us who are believers on earth. So we learn from that verse that Satan is continually accusing us who are believers in Jesus in the heavens. Day and night he's accusing us before God. Why does Satan accuse us? What is his objective? It's very obvious, Satan wants to prove us *guilty*. Remember that guilt is Satan's main weapon against us. As long as he can keep us feeling guilty, we are no match for him. "Well, then," you

might say, “well, why doesn’t God silence Satan?” I’ll tell you one very good, practical reason, God isn’t going to silence Satan because He’s given *us* the means to silence Satan, and God is waiting for us to use those means. What are they? *Perfect praise*. ***“Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings, God has ordained strength [or perfected praise] that He might silence the enemy and the avenger.”*** Isn’t that good news, that when we learn to praise God aright we can silence Satan!

I’m reminded of something that happened in my ministry a good many years ago. I was pastoring a congregation in London, England. Two Russian Jewish women who were believers had come to visit my wife and me in our home, and we were praising the Lord together in our living room. And those two Russian Jewish believers, they really believed in praising the Lord out loud. In the middle of this, a lady who was a member of my congregation arrived unexpectedly, bringing her husband with her. She said, “This is my husband. He’s just come out of jail, he has an evil spirit and he needs deliverance.” I’ll tell you, that embarrassed me. I really didn’t know what to do about it but I couldn’t refuse, so I said, “Well, let’s just keep praying.” So we continued praying and praising the Lord out loud and after a while, this man who’d just come out of prison came up to me rather sheepishly and he said, “I’m going. There’s too much noise here!” Now, I hadn’t prepared any answer but I’m sure the answer that I gave him was the right one. I said, “Listen, the one who doesn’t like the noise is the devil because we are praising Jesus and the devil hates that! You’ve got two options. If you go now the devil will go with you, but if you stay the devil will go without you!” He said, “I’ll stay!” We went on praising the Lord and about ten minutes later he came up to me again. He said, “The devil’s just left. I felt him leave my throat!” Well, I’ve always remembered that. I really didn’t understand how to handle evil spirits at that time, but in my foolishness and ignorance and weakness, God came to my help and that man’s help too. And I took away from that a lesson. The lesson is this, when we praise the Lord out loud and continue to do it, we embarrass and trouble the devil much more than he can ever embarrass or trouble us.

So remember that in many situations, when you’re confronted with the challenge to praise the Lord, you’ve got two options, if you leave and give up, you’ll leave with the devil, but if you stay and just steadfastly praise the Lord, the devil will leave without you. Praise is a weapon given us by God to silence Satan and his accusations against us.

PART FIVE - WHEN? HOW? WHO?



Today I'm going to continue and conclude the theme that I've been dealing with all week, *praise*. Let me begin with a brief review of some of the main truths about praise that I've been sharing with you this week:

1. Praise is the unceasing activity of all the glorious creatures who have the most direct access to God in heaven.
2. For us on earth, praise is our way of access into God's presence and dwelling place.
3. Praise is the appropriate way that we relate to God as a King on His throne.
4. Praise is also a royal garment that makes us fit for His presence.
5. Praise is the *end purpose* for which God blesses us.
6. Praise is a means of deliverance.
7. Praise is a weapon of spiritual warfare that can actually silence Satan's accusations against us.

Today I'm going to be answering certain specific questions about praise:

1. *When* should we praise God?
2. *How* should we praise God?
3. *Who* should praise God?

Let's begin with the question, *when* should we praise God? In Psalm 145 verse 2, David says this to the Lord, **"Every day I will bless Thee, And I will praise Thy name forever and ever."** (NAS) "Every day" leaves out no days. How long is that to continue? "Forever and ever." In other words, there can never be a day or a time when we should *not* be praising the Lord! And then I'd like to read also the words of David in Psalm 34 verse 1. First of all, I want to point out the special title to this psalm. It's described as "A psalm of David when he feigned madness before Abimelech, who drove him away and he departed." At this time, David was a fugitive from his own land. He had been unjustly accused by King Saul, who is trying to catch him and put him to death. In desperation he had to flee to the court of a Gentile king, Abimelech, who was by no means a friend of David's people, Israel. In order to protect and preserve his life in the court of Abimelech, we read that David feigned to be mad, he slobbered on his beard and

he scabbled on the doors with his fingernails. And eventually, Abimelech was so tired of this apparent lunatic that he drove him out of his court. Now, that's the situation in which David wrote these words. I want you to listen to the words. ***"I will bless the LORD at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth."*** (NAS) What a victory! Right there in that desperate situation, with the humiliation of having to pretend to be mad in order to save his life, David comes out with this glorious declaration of praise! ***"I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth."*** How many of us would have felt like praising the Lord in such a situation? Of course, it isn't a matter of feeling; it's a matter of a decision. Remember, praise is a sacrifice. It comes from the will, not from the emotions, not from the circumstances. It's a decision and, you see, David had made that decision in *advance*. He was already decided what he would do. ***"I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall continually be in my mouth."*** So that's *when* we should praise the Lord, *every day, forever and ever, at all times, continually*.

The second question, *how* should we praise the Lord? Psalm 111 verse 1 says this, ***"Praise the LORD! I will extol the LORD with all my heart, In the council of the upright and in the assembly."*** (NIV) So that's how we should praise the Lord, with *all our heart*! I believe God is grieved when we offer Him faint, halfhearted praises, our mind on something else, ashamed, perhaps of what people might think if we really expressed our real feelings and our real love and devotion to the Lord. But the Scripture says we're to praise the Lord with *all* our heart.

And then in Psalm 47 verse 4, I'll read two versions. First, the King James, ***"For God is the King of all the earth, sing ye praises with understanding."*** (KJV) But the New American Standard says, ***"For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm."*** (NAS) So, we're to praise the Lord with understanding, or with skill. In other words, we're to give our mind and our ability to praising the Lord.

And then in Psalm 63 verses 4–5, David says this, ***"So I will bless Thee as long as I live, I will lift up my hands in Thy name. My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips."*** (NAS) Notice what David says there about the various ways that he's got to praise the Lord. He'll praise the Lord with *uplifted hands*, he'll praise the Lord with his *mouth*, he'll praise the Lord with his *lips*.

And then in Psalm 150 verse 4, ***"Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe."*** (NAS) There's a lot there about praising the Lord. Three kinds of musical instruments are specifically mentioned, the timbrel, stringed instruments and the pipe. And these are three different classes of instruments. The timbrel was a percussion instrument. The stringed instruments, of course, were strings. The pipe was a wind instrument. So, we're specifically told to praise the Lord with all those three kinds of musical instruments, percussion, strings and wind. And, also it says with dancing. And dancing, of course, involves the feet and, in fact, the whole body hands, arms, legs, feet every part of the body.

So, let's sum up how are we to praise the Lord. Here's a list:

- With our heart
- With our understanding
- With our mouth
- With our lips
- With our hands
- With our feet

- With our *whole* body
- And with various kinds of musical instruments.

Now I'll turn to the third question, *who* should praise the Lord? Let me read to you from Psalm 148 verses 2–4, and then verses 7–12. The first three verses deal with creatures on the heavenly realm, the remaining verses that I'm going to read deal with creatures on the earthly realm. First of all, let's look at who should praise the Lord in the heavenly realm, ***"Praise Him, all His angels, Praise Him, all His hosts! Praise Him, sun and moon, Praise Him, all stars of light! Praise Him, highest heavens, and the waters that are above the heavens!"*** That's the list of those who should praise the Lord on the heavenly realm.

Now let's come down to the earthly realm and see who is actually exhorted and called upon to praise the Lord here on earth. Beginning in verse 7 through 12, ***"Praise the LORD from the earth, Sea monsters and all deeps, Fire and hail, snow and clouds, Stormy wind, fulfilling His word, Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and winged fowl, Kings of the earth and all peoples, Princes and all judges of the earth, Both young men and virgins, Old men and children."*** (NAS) Let's go through that list. It's rich. It's exciting.

- Who are called upon to praise the Lord from heaven?

Verse 2: *angels, hosts.*

Verse 3: *sun and moon and stars,*

Verse 4: *the highest heavens and the waters above the heavens.*

- Who are called to praise the Lord from the earth?

Verse 7: *sea monsters and deeps.* (I've always loved the thought of the sea monsters praising the Lord and the deeps)

Verse 8: *fire, hail, snow, clouds, stormy wind* (isn't it good that even the stormy wind praises the Lord and fulfills His word! Next time you're in a stormy wind, remember that!)

Verse 9: *mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars.*

Verse 10: *beasts and cattle, creeping things and winged fowl.*

Verse 11: *kings and peoples, princes and judges.*

Verse 12: *young men and virgins, old men and children.*

I added up that list. You know how many different kinds of creatures are specifically called upon to praise the Lord? *Thirty different kinds of God's creatures!* Suppose you might think, though, that you're not included in that list, I don't really see how you could be left out, but suppose you felt left out, let me offer you this word: Psalm 150 verse 6, ***"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."*** (NAS) So you see, if you have breath, you have to praise the Lord! In fact, that's what your breath was given you for. You remember that I told you your tongue is your glory, it's put in your mouth to glorify God? And your breath is given you to enable your tongue to praise the Lord.

Just one final question and an important one. We've said who is to praise the Lord. Let's ask who does not praise the Lord. There's an answer given in Psalm 115 verse 17, ***"The dead do not***

praise the LORD, Nor do any who go down into silence..." (NAS) That's the *only kind of persons in the universe who do not praise the Lord, the dead!* And frankly, let me say to you dear friend, if you don't praise the Lord, that's a sign of spiritual death. The church or the group that doesn't praise the Lord aloud vocally, joyfully, continually, it's a sure mark of spiritual death. Rigor mortis has set in when people cease to praise the Lord.