

The Pivot Psalm -- Psalm 103

by A.B. Simpson

Praise is the true center of Christianity and the Christian life, and it is the pivot on which to hang our faith and hope and happiness and holiness.

Scripture: Psalm 103:1

Topics: "Gratitude", "Praise"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes that Psalm 103 serves as the pivot of the Christian life, centering on the theme of praise. He argues that praise is fundamental to faith, prayer, and the overall joy of life, encouraging believers to bless the Lord for His nature, benefits, and salvation. Simpson highlights the importance of recognizing God's goodness in creation, His healing power, and the deeper spiritual blessings that satisfy our souls. He concludes by reminding us of our covenant relationship with God and the anticipation of His coming kingdom, urging us to lead the chorus of praise in both heaven and earth.

Transcript

This is a strange term to give this Psalm, but it is an appropriate and impressive one. The first verse of this Psalm is said to be the very center of the Old Testament. In their jealousy for the integrity of the sacred Scriptures, the Jews counted the chapters and verses so that they could tell how many chapters and verses there were in the whole Bible, and know at once if there had been any addition to, or subtraction from, the original Scriptures.

In the very center of these chapters and verses we find this sublime note of praise. Surely, this is not an accident. Surely, it fittingly expresses the great truth that praise is the true center of Christianity and the Christian life, the true pivot on which to hang our faith and hope and happiness and holiness. Surely, we shall have looked at this Psalm in vain if we learn from it nothing more than this, the high and fixed purpose that from this moment we shall make praise the very heart and center of our whole life.

What is faith but just such confidence in God that we can praise Him for what we desire? What is prayer but an ineffectual cry, until it reaches the spirit of praise and claims the answer which God cannot refuse to thanksgiving? It was when Paul and Silas ceased their praying and sang praises to God that the answer came from the rending earth and the responding heavens. This will turn every sorrow into joy, every cloud into sunshine, every hour into gladness, to say, no matter what meets us in the circumstances of life, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth." This is the praise Psalm of the Bible. Let it be the pivot of our life and the keynote of our songs. Many reasons are given here why we

should praise the Lord.

I. THE LORD HIMSELF

The first reason is found in the Lord Himself. Before any of His benefits are mentioned, or any causes for our thanksgiving are found in the circumstances of our life, he cries, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

It is the Lord and His holy name that constitute our first, and last, and highest cause for praise. I sometimes have tried to realize the thought: What if there had been no God, no universe, no creature, no man, no time, no eternity, no being to call anything into being, forever and forever, forever and forever -- nothing, nothing, and no possibility of anything. It is too terrible, and the brain sinks crushed beneath its awful weight. We are so glad to arouse ourselves from the hideous dream and realize that God is, as we cry, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

But, again, how different God might have been! He might have been a God of stern justice, of awful majesty, without mercy, grace, or love. Suppose He had been such a being as some of earth's cruel conquerors -- a Nebuchadnezzar or a Nero -- the embodiment of selfishness and power. We could not have resisted His will. But He could only have been to us a terror and an adversary. How we thank Him for what He is; that His nature and His name are love; that He delights in mercy; that He is slow to anger; that He is all that is lovely as well as all that is mighty, and again we cry, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

Again, He might have been all this and yet we never might have known Him. The millions of China know Him not. The savages of Africa know Him not. The devotees of Mohammedanism know Him not. Millions among us in Christian lands have never known Him. Why is it that we know Him? Only by His infinite grace that He has given us the light.

Oh, how much cause we have to praise Him! That He has revealed Himself to us; that He has given us the Bible; that He has given to us His Son; that He has given to us His Spirit; that He has cast our lot in Christian lands; that He has called us by His grace; that He has opened our eyes; that He is our God; that we know He loves us, cares for us; again we lift our hearts in the joyful song, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

II. HIS BENEFITS

The next cause for praise is His benefits; His kind acts toward us; His gracious dealings with us even before our spiritual mercies are mentioned, and our salvation is referred to. The goodness of God, even apart from salvation, is wonderful. How much God has done for us in our natural life and in His works of creation and providence! How kind the hand that formed us! How differently He might have made us!

Oh, the manifold wisdom and love displayed even in the human body and mind, and the constitution of our social and domestic life! How easy it would have been for God to have made us without these exquisite senses, tastes, and capacities! Suppose He had made the heavens yellow and the earth red. Our eyes would have been strained with agony and bewildered with the harsh, strong colors. Instead, He has made the curtain above us a delicate blue, and the carpet beneath us a soft green, resting our organs of vision, and affording the most exquisite delight by their beauty.

Suppose He had made us without the sense of taste. We might have been nourished by our food, but we would not have enjoyed it. But He has given us these sensitive palates that recognize the delicious flavor of things, and then He has provided the objects that gratify them. He might have made all the food alike, but He has spread our table with a hundred bounties, each contributing some new pleasure to our physical senses, and He has made the sense of smell, with all the delicious odors of the garden and the air. And so He has adjusted us to the world around us and adjusted the world to us.

More exquisite still are the affections that He has placed within our breasts, and the objects of love, the ties of nature, the home bonds that meet them with such blessed objects of regard and link us one to another by the cords of love! Oh, as we think of all the thousand ways in which He has studied the happiness of His creatures, our hearts respond with the glad song, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

III. SALVATION

The third ground for praising God is salvation. "Who forgives all your iniquities." This is the greatest blessing of all. Deeply as we realize it now, we never shall fully know what it means until that hour when we stand with Him amid the dissolving universe; and as we see the past from which we have been rescued, we shall send forth one shout of praise that shall reecho around the universe, "Salvation to our God which sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

"Who forgives all your iniquities." It is in the present tense, and the most universal sense. It is not some of our iniquities, but all. It is not merely once that He forgave, but He still forgives, and He will forever. He is forgiving now, and He is waiting today to be gracious. His blood keeps cleansing us from all sin. "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come [keep coming] unto God by him, seeing he ever lives to make intercession for them." We never get beyond that blood. Even as of old they carried the blood of the sacrifice into the holiest of all and touched every article in the Tabernacle with it, so, still, the blood of Jesus Christ goes with us all the way, and in our deepest and highest experiences it is more and more precious to our souls. We never get beyond the cross.

It is not necessary that we should sin willfully, but the holiest saint has ten thousand shortcomings of which he is ever conscious, and needs and loves to bathe afresh in the precious blood, and wash his feet in the basin which the blessed Master still holds for the feet of all His travel-stained disciples. Never need we remain a moment under the power or dominion of sin. Ever may we freely come to the precious fountain and sing the glad refrain,

"They're all taken away, away,

My sins are all taken away."

Later in the Psalm, a very beautiful figure is added to express the completeness of our salvation. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." This is a more beautiful figure than even David understood.

We know in the light of modern science that the East is infinitely distant from the West. We may go north a while, but we shall soon come to the end of North; or if we begin to go south, we soon reach the end of the southern limit and begin to go north. But go eastward, and there is no transition line that you can cross and begin to move westward. It is east forever, and though you encircle the world a thousand times, you

still are going east. And so it is with your journey westward, so that there is no place where East and West can meet. "So far has he removed our transgressions from us." They are traveling eternally apart from us, and the longer we live, the farther apart will they go. So perfect, so eternal is His forgiveness.

IV. PHYSICAL BLESSING AND HEALING

The next ground of his thanksgiving is God's physical blessing and healing of our diseases through His mercy and love. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, . . . who heals all your diseases." This is expressed in the very same terms as salvation. It is as absolute. It is as present. It is as universal and complete. It is as divine. He heals. They who try to contradict it are foolishly taking the bread of life from their own lips, and making of none effect the grace and mercy of God which they might enjoy.

In the next clause the source of this healing is represented. It is through Christ's redemption. "Who redeems your life from destruction." It is through the blood of Calvary and the redeeming purchase of Christ's atoning blood that this also comes to us. On the cross He bore our physical liabilities, and those who trust in Him are thus set free from the physical penalties of disease on account of sin.

There is still a higher phase of this precious truth brought out in this passage: "Your youth is renewed like the eagle's." This is the quickening life of Christ in our mortal flesh, giving vitality and spring to the body; taking away the effects of age and infirmity; keeping us in youthful vigor when nature has become exhausted; and imparting to our frame the life and energy of our risen Lord as the source of our health and strength.

This is more than being healed of disease and redeemed from death. It is being quickened in the higher life and filled with the vigor and energy of our Lord. Oh, how we should bless the Lord for it! Those of us who have experienced it can never tell how much it means. Oh, the weariness and pains it has taken away; the dreadful nights and wearing days that it has changed to times of sweet repose and hours of joyful service! Oh, the spring and gladness that it has put into our existence! Oh, the power it has given us for service! Oh, how much it has added to the years of time, multiplying each hour and making it manifoldly more by the enriching of His strength and love! How precious it has made Him! How real He has become, so that every nerve cord understands Him, every organ enjoys Him, and every fibre of our flesh seems to sing: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; . . . who heals all your diseases; who redeems your life from destruction; who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies; . . . so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

V. DEEPER SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

The next ground of gratitude to God is our deeper spiritual blessings and joys. "Who crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies; who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." This latter clause is unhappily translated. It is not "your mouth" but "your being." It means the inmost being. It is not "good things" but, literally, "the good." "Who satisfies your being with the good." It is not possible to satisfy our deeper being with earthly things, with any thing.

It was a fool who said in his heart to his soul, "Soul, you have much goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry." He tried to feed his soul on corn and wine, and barns, farms, and gain. But he was a fool. God told him so. The only thing that can meet the hunger of the heart is God Himself. It is He who is the good and who meets the need of the inmost being, satisfies it to the core. They that touch Him are conscious that they touch the center of our life; that He fills the inmost core of their

being.

There is something in Christ that does meet our spirit's utmost need. Put that flower away in the cellar, and it will get white and withered; bring it into the sun, and its whole organism will open up and absorb the light and life of that which is its god. So our being is made for Him, and He alone can fill it. There is not an instinct in your spirits, there is not a feeling in your heart, there is not a capacity in your mind, there is nothing in the little child, the maiden, the youth, the man, the woman, the sage, the poet, the artist, the loftiest or the lowliest intellect, but Christ can utterly satisfy. There is not a moment of our existence but may be spent in perfect rest and utter delight in His communion and blessing, and every fiber of our nature throb with the song of gladness: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, . . . who satisfies your being with the good" and who "crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

VI. COVENANT RELATIONS TO ISRAEL

Next the Psalmist praises God for His covenant relations to Israel and His people. Amid all their changes, frailties, and failures, He has been their faithful God, and, like a father, has carried them, remembering their frailty, forgiving their sin, and keeping covenant with them that serve Him.

VII. HIS COMING

He finally praises God because of His kingdom and His coming. "The Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom rules over all." Oh, how much cause we have to praise God for this! How glad I am that I am not king, but that God is on the throne, and that He is coming soon to reign over this revolted, disordered world. Things may look very strange and confused at times; someone else may seem to hold the reins, but bless the Lord, "The Lord sits king forever." "The Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice."

And soon He will come again. Not forever shall wrong be triumphant and right be trampled upon. Not forever shall we weep and wait. He is coming soon with His kingdom and righteousness and peace, and with our robes and crowns. Let us rejoice because "The Lord has prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom [dominion] rules over all," and "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Then the Psalm closes with the majestic peroration in which he calls upon the heavenly hosts, the universe, creation, and all the works of God to praise and magnify His glorious name.

What does this mean? Why, beloved, that you and I, His ransomed ones, are to lead the chorus of earth and heaven, and to sing a louder, sweeter song than angels in glory can ever know, or warbling bird or sweet songster of earth can ever sing. Could you and I enter heaven today, we would be astonished at its music. But, O beloved, there is something higher and nobler for you and me than even the songs of angels. God calls upon us here, not to listen to them, but to lead them, to rise above them, and to awake their harps to melodies they never knew before. The day is coming when, higher and nearer the throne than they, we shall give the keynote to the choruses of heaven, and they shall be glad to follow in the loud refrain.

Think, we can have a song they never can sing, of that redemption they have not needed and they have never shared.

And then it means still further, that as we go out among the works of God, which are full of praise and gladness, we shall be gladder than they. As we look in the sunshine, we are to shine with a radiance that

the sun can never know. As we gaze upon the beauty and bloom of nature, we are to glorify God with a loveliness and with a radiance that earth can never wear. As we hear the hum of ten thousand insects, and the songs that warble from the branches of the summer woods, from the bursting throats of the little birds, and the thrilling melodies of nature, we are to praise Him whom they can never know as we know Him. He is our Father and our Friend.

Oh, is it ever so? Is it not often sadly, shamefully different? Have you gone out in this bright, glad world many a time with a shadowed face and a mournful spirit, with a dirge in every tone, and a groan in every breath? Why, the little birds upon the trees and the insects at your feet were reproving you to your face, and seeming to say, Praise the Lord. God forbid that they should have to awaken our songs! Rather does this glorious Psalm mean that we are to lead them in a chorus of praise; and, taking our place in the center of this universe, to strike the keynote of every strain, until, through heaven and earth, His redemption song shall ring, and roll away to the boundaries of immensity, a Hallelujah Chorus to Him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb.

This is the glorious picture that inspiration has given us in the Apocalypse of John. In the closing verses of the fifth chapter of Revelation, we find the redeemed in the very center of the throne. Around them, farther and farther out, are the circles of creation. First, the angels, and then the whole creation of God, to the utmost confines of the universe; and, as they strike the song that angels cannot sing: "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God, . . . and have made us unto our God kings and priests," angels take up the chorus, the only chorus they can sing, and repeat the fourfold doxology: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

And then, further, our song is caught up by the whole creation, out and out, and on and on, from world to world, and then away

"Where worlds beyond the farthest star

That ever met the human eye

Catch the loud anthem from afar,

That rolls along immensity."

until at last the outermost boundary of creation is reached, and then the tide rolls back to the throne. The waves of melody, like the reflux billows of the ocean, return; and as they reach the center once again, lo! the elders fall upon their faces before the throne, and the song is lost in silence; and the deepest, highest of all praise, and all worship, and all speech, and all thought, and all feeling, completes the great doxology -- the silence that falls upon its face, and in the wordless praise of the Spirit's deepest joy, worships God.

Beloved, this is to be our eternal employ, to lead the songs of heaven. Oh, let us learn it now.

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