

Praising and Blessing God

by H.J. Vine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of praising and blessing God, and how this can be done in response to the blessing of the ascended Man, Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 22:3, Luke 24:53, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 7:7

Topics: "Christ Ascended", "Worship And Praise"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the significance of the ascension of Christ, highlighting the joy and blessing that comes from recognizing the exalted Man, Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God in heaven. The disciples' experience of seeing the risen, victorious Man ascend led to great joy and praise, emphasizing the eternal victory and triumph of Christ over death and the grave. The sermon delves into the spiritual implications of Christ's ascension, the blessings received from Him, and the continuous worship and praise that believers are called to offer to God by Jesus Christ.

Transcript

With the above words the inspired gospel of the perfect Man ends (Luke 24:53), and we may well ask, what caused the disciples' hearts to rise up thus and with such great joy to praise and bless God? They had just seen that perfect Man ascend from earth to heaven, and as our faith lays hold of the stupendous victory involved, for the believer's blessing and for God's glory, we, too, with deepening joy shall continue to sing--

"Rise our hearts and bless the Father,

Ceaseless song e'en here begun;

Endless praise and adoration

To the Father and the Son."

Yes, there is a Man in heaven--"The Man Christ Jesus!" There is a Man sitting "on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens"--the Son of God. The Spirit of God has come from thence to glorify Him, as He said, "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you." Moreover the coming of the Spirit baptized all who believed on Him into one body, and the Man at God's right hand is the Head of that body; but those who believe are also built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit, who has come from the Son of God on high. The marvellous fact, having such universal import,

is--A Man sits exalted in heaven and God has a habitation on earth! All this was involved in the ascension of Christ which the disciples saw, but the truth was not unfolded until the Spirit came to indwell us.

"Tis thence now Christ is gone on high,

Redemption's work-complete,

The Spirit brings His glory nigh

To those who for Him wait."

As our hearts are thus filled by what the Spirit of God delights to bring before us, praise will ascend as a sweet-smelling savour to God. Israel of old brought up their burnt offerings to the house of God, and by the priest they were offered to ascend from the altar as fragrant sacrifices to God, for they pointed on to the one perfect offering of Christ; but now, by Christ the risen One, we offer the sacrifice of praise "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

The Ascended Man

Just before our risen Lord ascended, He said to His own, "Behold My hands and My feet that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see Me having." Yes, there standing in their midst was the risen Man, who by His sufferings and death had secured eternal redemption for them--He was indeed a real Man!

It is this truth, coupled with the fact that He has ascended as a Man with "flesh and bones" to God's right hand, that has turned what looked like the defeat of God's purpose for man into a most glorious and everlasting victory. Man fell in Adam: man is exalted in Christ.

Long ago the question was raised, "What is man?" The answer is now given--"We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour." What triumph! and those who are His are "more than conquerors" through Him that loves them. Moreover God Himself has secured in that exalted Man the effectuation of all His counsels of love and glory.

As the Son of Man our glorified Saviour is yet to take up the kingdom and dominion over this earth, and as Son of David all the rights and titles of His father's throne belong to Him, and He now waits in patience till the appointed hour when He shall "sit upon the throne of His father David." Why, then, did He not honour "the city of the great King," Jerusalem, as the place of His ascension to the right hand of God? How could He? The responsible leaders had rejected Him! The Man who is honoured in heaven is the rejected of earth! That makes the present position a very serious one in a certain sense for those who are loyal to this rejected One, although the fact of His exaltation on high may well fill our hearts with great joy on the other hand as it did the disciples' hearts at the beginning, for He sits in triumph, waiting at the right hand of the throne in heaven until the time which now draws nigh.

No, He did not ascend from the official centre, the city which shall yet--when repentant, cleansed and sanctified--yield to Him with reverence and rejoicing the royal honours which are rightly His. He ascended from another spot. He did not link the earthly city in her then unfaithful state with heaven. He chose another place--a place little thought of by the religionists of Jerusalem, whether ritualistic or rationalistic--Pharisees or Sadducees--Jesus led His disciples "out as far as to Bethany." From that part of the Mount of Olives He ascended.

But why Bethany? Did He not always find solace there when refused elsewhere? Did He not receive kingly honour there when scorned elsewhere? Did He not feast in the house of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus when despised by others? Was not that house in Bethany filled with the sweet odour of the royal anointing which He there received when others plotted His death? Was not that house (where the three inmates knew His resurrection power and His love) the place in Bethany where responsive service and love were His portion? He led His own out as far as to Bethany. There He Himself and His love were prized; at Jerusalem they esteemed Him not.

"Two or three" gathered to His Name may answer to the Bethany abode today. There the ascended Lord, the victorious Son of God, is known, and His power and love are cherished; but the disciples were "led out" to reach that favoured, yet little thought-of spot. Yes, led out from the proud, unfaithful centre, "as far as" to Bethany. There the house of welcome was hidden away by the slopes of Olivet from the city which despised Jesus, from the place where His Name was dishonoured. We are told, "He calleth His own sheep by name and leadeth them out." A great gap lay between official religion and vital reality then, and it is so now. Indeed, the gap is widening daily as responsible professors are being carried away by modernist doctrines which are dishonouring to the Son of God. We may not, however, dwell on this, but rather encourage those who glory in Christ Jesus and worship God by the Spirit to continue in power and the love of their ascended Head, Saviour, and Lord. He says, "Abide in Me."

After Jesus had led His disciples "out as far as to Bethany, He lifted up His hands and blessed them." That must have moved their souls very deeply. He had just previously showed them those same hands to convince them that He was still a real Man risen from among the dead, and they were filled with wonder and joy; but now those hands were lifted up for those who knew Him as the risen Man, the Victor over death and the grave, and He blessed them. In that outside spot with Himself, they know the lifting up of the hands, that had finished the work of salvation upon the cross--the lifting up of the hands that had laid the foundation of Calvary for the superstructure of eternal glory, and they know also the personal blessing and presence of the Son of God. All this results in filling their souls with great joy, and in making them overflow in praising and blessing God. We first receive and then respond.

"He Blessed Them"

When the Apostle Paul allowed his pen to express the responsive blessing Godward which awakened in his heart, he wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"; and then immediately added that which showed it was responsive--for God's blessing had preceded it--"Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." The receiving goes before the responding, and the receiving is to go on even as the responding is also to continue in the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. We receive by the Spirit and we worship by the Spirit. The Lord blessed the disciples, but further it is said, "While He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." From thence, as we have seen, He sent down the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus was blessing them as He ascended, and that attitude of blessing His own is still unchanged. The declensions and revivals of the centuries that have intervened since then have not altered Him. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. He gave Himself for our blessing, He lives for our blessing, and He will rejoice in our blessing for ever.

It is not surprising to read that the disciples worshipped Him. Now and again we find them rendering homage to the Son of God as the truth of who He was came home to them. In the ninth chapter of John, too, we read of the man whose eyes Jesus had opened worshipping Him as the Son of God after He had been "cast out" by the religious officials of that time. It is a great privilege to know the Son of God and to

be with those who worship Him. He does not refuse their worship, for though a real Man, He is more, He is God as well as Man.

The spiritual house which is built up in relation to Him as the Rejected of men and the Accepted of God holds fast to Himself, even as we read, "Whose house are we if we hold fast," and our Lord Jesus Christ is the glorious Overseer of the house as Son. Therefore we may be sure of this, if He blessed His own as He ascended, He still continues to bless them.

"'Tis His great delight to bless us--

Oh, how He loves."

The effect upon the disciples at the beginning was, as we have seen--great joy filled their hearts, and they praised and blessed God; and as we behold by faith the risen, victorious Man, ascended into heaven, and receive the benefit and blessing which flows to us as a consequence, great joy will also be our portion at the end of the assembly's history on earth, and we, too, shall be found together "praising and blessing God."

Someone may say, "I can understand God blessing us, for it is written in Hebrews 7:7, 'The less is blessed of the better.' It is difficult, however, to see how we can bless God." The Spirit of God Himself has approvingly recorded the fact in the Word, but He shows that it is a responsive thing with us, as we have pointed out. The case given in Hebrews 7 is to prove the superiority of the Melchisedec order of priesthood to that of Aaron. It is always true that blessing originates with the superior. It is just so in the case of those who belong to God's "spiritual house" today, all their blessing came from God. The response given is of such a character that it is acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ in the Spirit's grace and power. Blessing God in that sense may reverently be spoken of as ministering to His happiness! What an honour bestowed upon the redeemed today! Wonderful, indeed is this truth--we can bless God! Shall we not seek that He may receive more from our rejoicing hearts? If Paul and Silas in the prison could sing His praises at midnight, when their feet were fast in the stocks, and their backs were sore--if they in such circumstances were so filled with the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich that they "sang praises unto God"--what a volume of praise and blessing He ought to receive from those who dwell in His house today.

"What love to Thee we owe,

Our God, for all Thy grace,

Our hearts may well o'erflow

In everlasting praise!"

"Continually in the Temple"

Quite naturally the disciples returned together to the place of Jehovah's Name. It was from thence that offerings were to ascend to Him as a sweet incense. Filled with the blessing of the ascended Man, and filled with great joy, together they were found "continually in the temple" giving to God spiritual sacrifices, giving glory to His holy Name, as He had said--He that offereth praise glorifieth Me.

The temple built by man still stood at Jerusalem, and though it was rejected by God as a den of thieves, it had not yet been actually destroyed by Titus, as was foretold; since then, however, those who have

redemption in Christ through His blood, are growing to a holy temple in the Lord. The rejected One, Jesus Christ Himself, is the Corner-Stone, in whom all the building is fitted together. When that temple is complete it will be filled with the presence and the glory of God, and it will shine forth in divine splendour for the praise of God's glory. Meanwhile, however, the saints of God are builded together in the Lord for a habitation of God in the Spirit now, and He delights to dwell where their praises ascend. Even of old, He was addressed as "Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel" (Ps. 22:3). How sweet it must have been to Him to receive at the closing days of that rejected house at Jerusalem, praise and blessing in spite of the unfaithfulness surrounding the disciples--praise, sweeter than had been heard there before! How much richer should the offerings be now that the house is built up in the Lord--in Him who ever abides--in Him who remains faithful for ever!

We need to remember that the house today is designated "a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5), and that the praises which are there yielded to God are called "spiritual sacrifices," also that they are acceptable to Him by Jesus Christ. All is of a spiritual character, and worship to God today must be in spirit and in truth. This sets aside completely the religious buildings, organizations and entertainments with which Christendom abounds, and gives holy freedom to those who are gathered to the Lord to offer to God that which is pleasing to Him "by Jesus Christ," even though they be but "two or three." They offer "by Him," for He is over the house. No pope, priest or president is needed. Indeed, such only displace Christ, and put the worshippers at a distance from God, whereas in Christ they are made nigh through His blood, and the verse we have already mentioned shows that they are all priests--"a holy priesthood," and in liberty and nearness they can offer to God.

This is important today when what is vital is being crushed by what is official; but we should always see to it that our hymns and songs of praise are Godward. The heart is turned directly to Him in faith and in the energy of the Spirit. Probably most of religious singing today is manward; the house of God exists for His praise. In Ephesians 5:19 we are exhorted to make melody in our hearts to the Lord, and in Colossians 3:16, to sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. The praise should surely be none the less hearty, but increasingly so as God Himself is before us, knowing, too, that He finds pleasure in the offerings which we bring to Him by His beloved Son. As we reach the close of this wonderful day of grace--as we draw near to the moment of the Lord's coming for the assembly--as the darkness deepens in official Christendom--may we allow the blessing of the ascended, victorious Man, the Son of God, to fill our hearts with great joy, so that we may be found responding like the disciples at the close of the past day--"praising and blessing God."

There was continuity also! Mark that word "continually"! We do not seek just a burst of praise and then a fall to the murmuring which is so prevalent on all hands! The declension need not hinder us; all that was foreseen of God, and still He exhorts us to "offer the sacrifice of praise continually" by our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no declension or failure with Him, and as He fills our gaze we shall even yet give to God the praise which is His rightful portion. Our Lord Jesus Christ is enough for us. "In Him" we are blessed--"blessed with every spiritual blessing." "By Him" we offer "the sacrifice of praise continually, that is, the fruit of our lips!"--"With Him" is our eternal portion--as He said, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also"; and then nothing shall ever intrude to binder praise and worship from flowing to God. Meanwhile, may we have grace at the end to be more like those at the beginning who were "continually in the temple praising and blessing God," having seen the Man Christ Jesus ascend to heaven while He was blessing them.

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