

(New Wine in New Wineskins) 11. Victory Through Praise

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of praise and thanksgiving as the chief mark of faith, and how it can make a way for God to show His deliverance.

Scripture: Psalm 22:3, Psalm 50:23, Psalm 106:12, Psalm 149:9, Isaiah 61:1-3, Matthew 21:15-16, Acts 16:25-26, Romans 8:28, Philippians 2:12-14, Hebrews 2:12-13

Topics: "Faith", "Praise and Worship"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes that as disciples of Jesus, our calling is to live by faith, which is marked by praise and thanksgiving. Unlike the Israelites who praised God only after seeing their enemies defeated, we are called to believe and praise God even in the face of challenges, trusting in His timing and sovereignty. Poonen highlights that true praise stems from a crucified life and is essential for experiencing God's deliverance, as demonstrated in biblical examples like Jehoshaphat and Paul and Silas. He encourages believers to cultivate a lifestyle of praise, which prepares a throne for God in our hearts and homes, and to reject grumbling and complaining. Ultimately, Poonen calls for a new song of praise that honors God in all circumstances.

Transcript

Our calling as disciples of Jesus is to live by faith. The chief mark of faith is praise and thanksgiving. "They believed His wordsthey sang His praise" (Psalm 106:12). The Israelites referred to there could however, praise God only after they saw the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea. Then they believed God and praised Him. They walked by sight.

But we walk by faith. We can believe God's word even before we see our enemies drowned in the sea, and we can praise God even while our enemies are still before us. We believe that God will deal with them in His own way and in His own time. This is why we who are under the new covenant can praise God in all circumstances and at all times.

In Hebrews 2:12, 13 we read that Jesus Himself leads us in the midst of the church in praise to God our Father, because we "put out trust in Him". Trust and praise are two sides of one coin. Faith, without praise and thanksgiving, is a counterfeit faith - a dead faith. As 'younger brothers' of Jesus (which is what He calls us in Hebrews 2:11, 12), we are called to follow the example of our Elder Brother in praising the

Father - privately, as well as "in the midst of the church".

God is a great King, but the throne He sits on is not made of silver or gold. Such a throne would be too cheap for Him. "Thou art enthroned upon the praises of Thy people", says the psalmist (Psalm 22:3). Praise forms the throne on which God sits as a King. This is why heaven is a place of perpetual praise. The angels are constantly praising God. This is the throne on which God sits in heaven. When the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, He brings heaven down into our hearts and we too can prepare a throne of praise for our God to be enthroned upon - in our hearts, in our homes and in the church.

This is why it is so important to work out our salvation from all grumbling and complaining, with fear and trembling, for God (the Holy Spirit) is working in our hearts to prepare a throne for the Father (See Philippians 2:12-14 together). God is also working outside of us in all our circumstances to make them work together for our good. So there is really nothing to grumble or complain about - if we have faith in Romans 8:28.

It is not possible to praise God effectively in the church, if we are grumbling and complaining at other times at home or in the office. True praise can only come from a crucified life. It is significant that the only verse in the Bible that tells us that God sits on the throne of the praises of His people is found in the midst of a psalm that vividly portrays the crucifixion (Psalm 22:3). The psalm begins with the cry of Jesus on the cross and it refers to His hands and feet being pierced (verse 16); and then in the midst of this very psalm, Jesus refers to us as His younger brothers and invites us to join Him in preparing a throne of praise for the Father (see verses 22, 23). We too are crucified with Him on the same cross - and there, while crucified with Him to the world, and to our lusts, we sing the praise of the Father. Herein lies the hollowness of a lot of praise and worship that is found in many churches, where the word of the cross does not have the central place. Some who have seen this hollowness have reacted against praise and worship altogether and decided that it has no place in the new covenant worship. But this is to fall over the cliff on the opposite side!

On the cross, crucified with Christ, we prepare a throne of praise for the Father. Psalm 118 is another psalm of the cross and of Christ (see verses 11-14, 22). We lay ourselves on the altar and bind ourselves with cords to the cross (verse 27), and lying there we "give thanks to the Lord" (verse 28, 29) and say, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (verse 24).

Jesus has been anointed as our Head to give us "the oil of gladness and the garment of praise" (Isaiah 61:1-3), instead of the spirit of heaviness and depression. If you are living under the spirit of depression, you can be sure that it is the work of Satan. Jesus has come to cast out that spirit from your life permanently, and to clothe and cover you with the garment of praise. It is never God's will for us to be depressed or discouraged or in a bad mood - for Jesus was never depressed, discouraged or in a bad mood at any time; and we are called to walk even as He walked (1 John 2:6). But this is only possible if we take up the cross each day, as Jesus did.

In Psalm 8:2 we read that from the mouths of infants and nursing babes, God establishes strength to defeat the enemies. Jesus quoted this verse at the time when the chief priests criticised the children for shouting and praising God (Matthew 21:15, 16). The chief priests, like many today, felt that in the house of God no one should shout or raise their voice in praise and worship. They thought that people should be long-faced and quiet in God's presence. But Jesus was thrilled to hear the noise of praise, for it reminded Him of His heavenly home where the angels praise God in voices that sound like loud thunders! This is

one reason why Satan and his hosts cannot dwell in heaven - for they cannot stand the shouts of sincere praise to God. Neither can they stand it when such praise is found in any church here on earth. And so they will try one of two methods - either to rob the sincerity out of the praise or to stop the shouts of praise altogether. As one looks around at the various Christian denominations, one finds that Satan has succeeded almost everywhere with one of these two methods.

Why does Satan hate sincere praise to God? Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2 and said the 'strength' spoken of in that psalm was actually 'praise' (Matthew 21:16). Praise is the strength by which the enemy is driven out (Psalm 8:2).

Empty shouts of praise that do not come from a holy life, however, do not have any power. In Exodus 32, we read that the Israelites made a golden calf and even called it 'Jehovah' (verse 5) and danced and shouted to their 'Jehovah' with such a loud voice that Moses and Joshua heard it miles away (verse 17-19). But Satan was right in the midst of all that charismatic praise! There was immorality in their midst just as there is in the midst of many today who shout and dance in the name of 'Jesus'.

As we said earlier, our praise becomes powerful only when it comes from a crucified, holy life.

In Luke 19:37, 38, when all the disciples of Jesus began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice, the Pharisees were disturbed and asked Jesus to tell His disciples to keep quiet. But Jesus replied that if those disciples kept quiet, the stones would begin to cry out in praise to God (verse 40). Thus we see Jesus' opinion of loud praise and the opinion of the Pharisees. How is it in your church? Do you follow the Pharisees or Jesus? It is because we seek the honour of men so much (of Christian leaders particularly) that we are afraid to shout and praise God in the assembly. Religious tradition followed in a particular group may have frowned upon loud praise, and so everybody in that group blindly follows such a tradition. But we have to do violence to such traditions if we are to be followers of Jesus and possess the kingdom (Matthew 11:12).

Jesus had spent millions of years in the presence of His Father where the atmosphere was one of praise and worship. When He came to earth and lived among glum, sour-faced gloomy, religious people, it was quite a change from the atmosphere of heaven. It thrilled Him therefore whenever He saw a few who had something of the praising atmosphere of heaven in them.

In the book of Revelation, where many 'sevens' are found, we also have seven glimpses of praise in heaven. If you have the patience to look through those passages, it would revolutionise your idea of heaven altogether. The passages are: Revelation 4:8-11; 5:8-14; 7:9-12; 11:15-18; 14:1-4; 15:1-4 and 19:1-6. Every glimpse we have there of our future home is one of joyful praise that sounds like mighty peals of thunder (19:6). They praise God there for His sovereignty, His holiness, His judgments, etc. Not one word of complaint is heard there; and there is not one long-faced, gloomy angel! If we do not get acclimatised to this atmosphere now, we will get a culture shock when we get into the Lord's presence and hear people repeatedly saying "Hallelujah" and "Amen". Notice, however, that the hallelujahs and amens of heaven are not meaningless. They say "Hallelujah because (see Revelation 19:1, 2, 6). It is meaningful worship and praise in the beauty of holiness. This is what the Holy Spirit has come to reproduce in our lives and in our churches.

We are told that the 144,000 learned this new song while on earth (Revelation 14:1-4). The old song that everyone on earth sings is the song of grumbling and complaining against people and circumstances. But a few who follow the Lamb wherever He goes (verse 4) - that is those who take up the cross daily - have

learnt to hate themselves (Luke 14:26) and thus have eliminated grumbling and complaining from their lives totally - and having faith in the sovereignty of God (Romans 8:28), they have learnt to give thanks in everything (1 Thessalonians 5:18), for everything (Ephesians 5:20) and for all men (1 Timothy 2:1). In all the trying situations that they faced on earth, they bore the dying of Jesus in their bodies and learnt the new song of praise and worship, in all circumstances and for all people. Thus they stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion in the final day.

It is not enough that we praise God in our hearts. We are to offer to God the sacrifices of praise (that is praise that comes from a crucified life) through our lips; and this is one of the few things in the New Testament that we are told to do continually (Hebrews 13:15). What fills the heart overflows through the mouth, Jesus said (Matthew 12:34). So if praise does not flow from our lips, it is a clear indication that praise has not filled our heart. "With the mouth we confess, resulting in deliverance (salvation)" (Romans 10:10).

In Psalm 50:23, we read, "He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honours Me and makes a way for Me to show him My deliverance (salvation)" (literal translation).

God is able to deliver us out of many situations, only when we begin to praise Him - for praise alone is the mark of faith. Prayer alone cannot deliver us out of many situations. We must keep praying until we reach the point where we have the assurance of the Spirit in our heart that our prayer has been heard. Faith is then born and we "believe that we have received", even though we do not see the answer yet. Then, and then only, did Jesus say that we could receive what we pray for (Mark 11:24). But what is the evidence that such faith is born in our heart? We stop praying and start praising God. That, and that alone, is the clearest evidence of faith. Thus we make a way for God to show us His deliverance.

In 2 Chronicles 20, we see an example of this. There we see Jehoshapat surrounded by a great multitude of enemies (verse 2). Jehoshapat did the wisest thing that anyone can do when surrounded by problems like that. He fasted and prayed and sought the face of the Lord. His prayer is described for us in verses 6-12, and we notice seven things there.

He praised God for His sovereignty (verse 6).

He reminded himself of what God had done in past days (verse 7).

He reminded God of His promise in the word (verse 9).

He reminded God that they were God's own inheritance (verse 11).

He told God that they had no power at all to deal with the situation (verse 12).

He told God that they had no wisdom either (verse 12).

He told God that they were relying on Him (verse 12).

This is a good pattern for our praying too. God answered at once and said that He would deal with the situation. Jehoshapat believed God and sent forth in front of the army, a choir of people who praised God with songs in a loud voice. Through that sacrifice of praise in the face of the enemies, Jehoshapat made a way for God to show His deliverance. And God did just that. He routed the enemies thoroughly (verse 22).

In the book of Jonah we see another example of this. Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights, and he had not even prayed during that time (1:17). "Then", it says in 2:1 (that is after the three days and nights), Jonah began to pray. Maybe for the first three days Jonah was trying to crawl up to the fish's mouth - just like we try every possible method to get out of our problems. When all human help fails, then only do most people seek God. And then only did Jonah seek God - after his own best efforts had failed.

And God waits till we come to the end of ourselves. Jonah then prayed and prayed. But still nothing happened, until he began to offer "the sacrifice of thanksgiving" saying that deliverance comes only from the Lord (2:9). When Jonah began to praise God while still in the midst of his unsolved problem, he made a way thereby for God to show him His deliverance. Immediately (we read in 2:10), the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out on the dry land.

How much longer are we going to stay in the stomach of the fish (our particular problem) before we offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving? God cannot deliver us because we do not honour Him by praising Him for all things; and so we do not make a way for Him to deliver us (Psalm 50:23).

One final example - from Acts 16. There we read of Paul and Silas being jailed for preaching the gospel. At midnight, instead of sleeping (and far less complaining or grumbling), they began to pray and praise God in song. They had no complaints. They believed perfectly in God's sovereignty, and praised God. Immediately God opened the prison doors for them. That was possible because Paul and Silas made a way for God to work for them through the sacrifice of praise that came from their lips.

The key to every fish's mouth and every prison door is in the hands of our wonderful Lord (Revelation 3:7), and when He opens a door, no one can shut it. And until He opens it, all human help will only fail. It is easy to praise God when everything is going according to our desires and plans. But when things go contrary to our expectations, then is the time that we have the opportunity to offer the sacrifice of praise - for it costs us something to praise God in such situations. Thus we can make a way for God to show us His deliverance.

Psalm 149:9 invites us to have the high praise of God in our mouth when lying on our bed (which is the place where we usually lie down and worry!) and says that with such praises we can bind the powers of darkness and execute on them the judgment that is written in God's word for them (Romans 16:20). This is a privilege reserved for all of God's children (Psalm 149:9).

Let us then learn the new song of praise and thanksgiving in all circumstances, for all circumstances and for all people, during the rest of the days that are left us on earth - that we may honour God thereby and experience His deliverances all the days of our life. Amen.

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