

The Spirit of Praise and Holiness

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith, praise, and holiness in our lives, and how these qualities can help us to overcome our problems and endure in steadfastness.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20:12, Psalm 23:1-5, Psalm 106:12, John 19:11, Romans 8:8, Hebrews 2:12, James 1:5-6, Revelation 19:10

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Praise and Holiness"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the power of prayer and praise in spiritual warfare, using King Jehoshaphat's example from 2 Chronicles 20. When faced with overwhelming enemies, Jehoshaphat led Judah in fasting and prayer, acknowledging their weakness and placing their trust in God. His declaration, 'Our eyes are on Thee,' exemplifies the faith needed to invite God's intervention, which resulted in victory through praise. Poonen warns against the extremes of emotional praise without holiness and serious living without joy, urging believers to embody both praise and holiness as they follow Christ. Ultimately, he encourages a faith-filled praise that acknowledges God's sovereignty, even amidst trials.

Transcript

In 2 Chronicles 20, we see a picture of how we can wage warfare against Satan. There we read of a great multitude that came against King Jehoshaphat. But Jehoshaphat did the right thing, when confronted by so many enemies. He got the whole nation of Judah to seek God in fasting and prayer. Then he prayed to God acknowledging their weakness, their foolishness and their faith. He said, "O our God, wilt Thou not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on Thee" (v.12). This is the secret of all effective prayer - to recognise our weakness and our foolishness, and to trust God utterly to fight the battle for us.

Jehoshaphat confessed that he did not know what to do - and that is a good confession to make, for God has promised to give wisdom to all those who acknowledge their lack of it. But we have to ask for wisdom in faith (Jas.1:5,6). And that was what Jehoshaphat did. He did not merely acknowledge his impotence and his lack of wisdom; He concluded his prayer with an expression of absolute trust in God. He said, "But our eyes are on Thee". In other words, he was telling God, "We are expecting you to work on our behalf". AND GOD DID!! As soon as Jehoshaphat finished praying, God immediately sent him a reply saying, "Do not fear, for THE BATTLE IS NOT YOURS BUT GOD'S. You need not fight in this battle. Stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf" (v.15,17). Jehoshaphat worshipped the Lord as soon as he heard

those words of the Lord. The next morning he placed "singers and those who praised the Lord in holy attire" in the forefront of the army to lead Judah's soldiers to battle. And as soon as they began to sing and praise the Lord, the Lord defeated their enemies (v.21,22).

It is the spirit of praise expressing our faith in the Lord that puts the enemy to flight. We see further that they praised the Lord in holy attire. This is the balance that we need in the church - the spirit of praise and holiness. In Christendom unfortunately, we find believers at two extremes in this matter. On the one hand we find those who are not living holy lives, who praise God with loud voices and with a lot of emotion. They praise the Lord in other tongues in the meetings and then go home and shout at their wives in their mother tongues!! This is one extreme of deception. To the soulish person who has no discernment, such noise and emotions can look heavenly. But those with discernment will recognise that "all who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom.8:8), no matter how emotionally they sing in 'tongues', or how loudly they praise the Lord. At the other extreme, we see many who sincerely judge themselves and seek to live godly lives, but who never seem to have a spirit of praise in their lives. They seem to believe only in exhorting one another all the time - and they look so serious and gloomy while they are at it!

It is written about Jesus in Hebrews 2:12 that He does two things in the midst of the church: (1) Proclaim the Father's Name. (2) Sing the Father's praise. Jesus is not only the Messenger of the Father who brings His Word to us, but also the Praise-leader and the Song-leader in the church. These then are the two areas in which we must all follow Jesus as our Forerunner and Elder Brother, in the meetings of the church.

When we stand up to share the Word in the church it is the Name of our Father that we must proclaim, and not our own. We are not to stand up to show others how well we can preach, or how faithful we have been during the past week. Neither are we to hit people on their heads with some word that we have found in the Scriptures for their need!! All such preaching is earthly, soulish and demonic, and is a shameful disgrace to the Lord's Name. The testimony of Jesus alone is the spirit of all anointed prophecy (Rev.19:10). We must also follow Jesus in raising our voices to praise the Father in the church. It is not enough to pray. We must praise God too. Ten lepers prayed to Jesus for healing. Only one praised Him. The proportion unfortunately is about the same in the church today.

The result of Jehoshaphat's approach to the battle was that "not one (of the enemies) escaped" (v.24). What that means for us is that if we approach the battle against Satan in the same way - with faith and praise - not a single one of our problems will remain unsolved. 2 Chronicles 20 begins with "a multitude of enemies(problems)", but ends with "not one enemy (problem) left". God is mightily able to resolve every single problem in our lives. The people of Judah became rich from the spoils of battle (v.25). And this is the way of acquiring spiritual wealth for us too.

The sad thing is that Jehoshaphat forgot what he learnt that day, and backslid and compromised towards the end of his life. Many who once learnt to "praise the Lord in holy attire", don't seem to be able to endure until the end in the same steadfastness. Somewhere along the line they compromise once again. But it need not be like that for us. God is mightily able to help us to endure until the very end. We praise the Lord at all times and for everything, not because "it could have been worse" (as the psychologists tell their patients to say), but because "it could not have been better" - for God makes everything work for our very best(Rom.8:28). That is the praise of faith. We can all look back at our past lives and see how God made many things that we thought would be bad for us, turn out for our very best. The Lord will do the same in the future too. If we believe that, we will praise the Lord at all times.

In Psalm 106:12, we read, "THEN they believed His words; they sang His praise". We read there that the Israelites who left Egypt could praise God only AFTER they saw all their enemies buried under the Red Sea(v.11). That is to live by sight - to praise God after He has solved all our problems. But that was all that was possible under the old covenant, because they could not live by faith.

But now under the new covenant, our heads are anointed with the oil of the Holy Spirit, and we praise God "in the presence of our enemies...because the Lord is our Shepherd and leads us beside waters of rest" (Psa.23:5,1,2). We can now praise God, even when the Red Sea has not opened up for us, and when the Egyptians are hot on our heels, and when mountains hedge us up on every side. That is praise that springs from a living faith in an Almighty God.

Even in the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil, for we believe that not a hair on our heads can be touched by our enemies without their getting permission from our Heavenly Father. Like Jesus, we can say to our enemies, "You can have no authority over us, unless it is given you from above by our Heavenly Father" (Jn.19:11). Therefore we never have any reason to feel sorry for ourselves, or to complain or grumble about our circumstances or about anyone.

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