

## “Why Should I Praise God Now?”

It is easy to praise God when times are going well. When life is good, we have no trouble offering praise to our Creator. But it is sometimes a different story when we hit a bump on the road called life. Praise to God doesn't flow as readily when we encounter a “Bridge Out” sign on our journey. Part of the dilemma comes with our understanding of what praise is.

Praise is derived from the Latin word "preiser" which means to prize -- praise is an expression of approval, a worship, and a valuation of that which has worth or merit. To *praise* is to *prize*; it is to glorify that *thing* or that *one* worthy of glory and honor. To the degree that something or someone is *worthy* of glory and honor -- to *that* degree praise is due. God is of infinite value and glory; God is due our infinite honor, our infinite praise. The Greeks used the term "doxa" to denote this response that is due God. "Doxa" is the root of doxology -- a song or expression of praise and worship. Doxology actually comes from two Greek words: "doxa," meaning praise and "logos," meaning logical message. How appropriate! This means that "doxology" literally defined is the logical expression of the emotion of praise. Head and heart are merged in worship through the doxology. The classical Greek philosophers -- who showed great reverence to philosophical pursuits -- used the word to express the holding to or the entertaining of a philosophical opinion. The Biblical writers used doxologies primarily to offer praise for *whom* God is and for *what* God does. The early church and the church throughout the ages sing and recite various doxologies. As a matter of fact, our primary purpose as Christians is to glorify God in our hearts and in our minds. This is the *logic* of praise. (Adapted by Michael Hodgkin from Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, published by G. & C. Merriam Company, Springfield, Massachusetts, 1981 & A Greek-English Lexicon Based on the German Work of Francis Passow, by Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, published by Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1856)

But again, it's not always *easy* to offer praise. Another consideration in offering praise to God during the difficult times is *perspective*. Mrs. Sinclair was complaining to Mrs. Jones about her new daughter-in-law.

"My poor son," she moaned, "his new wife is a leech. All she does is sit around all day. She has maids do her cooking and cleaning. My son is going broke buying her expensive gifts. She sleeps late every morning. He even brings her breakfast in bed!"

"A blessing, she isn't," Mrs. Jones concurred. "So, how is your daughter?"

"My daughter--now she is a lucky girl! She married a man who treats her like a princess. He buys her anything she wants; he hires people to take care of the house. She doesn't have to dirty a finger. And every morning he brings her breakfast in bed..."

Perspective. A dose of perspective can change mountains into molehills. And how we *view* life has a great deal with how we *live*. If our attitude is negative, then it only stands to reason that we will be a gloom-and-doom people. If we are easily overtaken by adversity, then a change in perspective may be prescribed simply to offer another angle.

Paul was fully aware of how *perspective* and *praise* were interrelated. In our New Testament Lesson today, he was writing to the Christians in Rome. These were people whom he had not met; the Church at Rome was probably started by some Jewish Christians who left Jerusalem after Pentecost. Paul knew them by reputation; they were known to have faced adversity and kept their faith. Rome, of course, was the capitol of the Empire. Christians were persecuted because of their faith; allegiance was to be offered to the Emperor. Living in the

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same city as the Emperor, Christians were targets of the government; faithful living was costly.

And against this backdrop, Paul writes, “We have peace.” It was a given: the faith of the Roman Christians had brought them salvation, and this salvation had resulted in peace.

Remember the formula: God’s grace plus our faith equals salvation. Peace is a by-product of our salvation.

Wait a minute. How could the Roman Christians have peace? If they practiced their faith, if they publicly demonstrated their allegiance to Christ, they were arrested. How could Christians in Rome have peace? That depends on perspective.

Our belief in the grace of Jesus Christ should be above everything. Our acceptance of the eternal life offered by the sacrificial death of God’s Son for us should stand in the forefront of our mind. Our salvation should set our entire life in perspective. It is an on-going process. The Greek verb means that we “*keep on enjoying peace.*” We should rejoice and give praise *because* of hope. Why can we be hopeful?

Even when we suffer, hope can be seen. Suffering is temporary; hope is eternal. Did you hear that? Even though you may feel that there is no way out, that life cannot get any worse, that your destiny is to have heartache, it is only temporary. But hope, on the other hand, is eternal. Many face turbulent times today. Some of you have been wrestling with a difficult decision and wonder how to be hopeful in such a tenuous time. Others today face problems at home with a family member and find little hope from a surface glance. Still, others worry because of your health and the *unknown* overclouds the hope of a blue sky. And then the question comes, “Why should I praise God now?” Remember, suffering is temporary; hope is eternal.

Noted Greek scholar A. T. Robertson writes, “It is one thing to submit to or endure tribulations without complaint, but it is another to find ground of glorying in the midst of them as Paul exhorts here.” (A. T. Roberson. Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. I. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Pub. 1931. p. 356) It is not enough to be optimistic in adverse situations. Paul is not just talking about the “power of positive thinking.” Instead, he is saying we have reason *not* to give up. Christ has given his life for *us* on the cross; when we accept his love, our salvation is sure. We don’t have to wonder if there is an expiration date to the offer of eternal life. We can find perfect peace in the midst of trials, because *nothing* is greater than our God. Whatever befalls us here is inconsequential when placed in the balance of an eternity with God. When our perspective is *God-sized*, then we will not fret the small stuff, because it *all* becomes small stuff. When we focus on the big picture, then we can find peace.

If we continue the faith through despair, keep the confidence amid sickness, be consistent in our belief despite trials, and hang on to hope when life is difficult, then our suffering produces perseverance. Why should I praise God now? Because suffering is temporary and produces perseverance.

There is much to be said for persevering through tribulation. If the focus is on the *suffering*, perseverance is difficult. If you are consumed by your dilemma, your days become longer. If you are fixated on your problem, then endurance will be hard to achieve. But if your perspective includes suffering as a component of the human experience, if you allow tribulation to enter your life as a *means* to grant you strength, if you are looking for the light called hope at the end of the tunnel rather than being paralyzed by the darkness, then you *will* persevere. Again, perspective is directly related to perseverance.

A story about a philosophical clock helps me to put some of the pressures of the present into perspective. About a hundred years ago, a clock maker built a magnificent grandfather

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clock that not only kept time, but could think as well. Soon after the clock was delivered to its owner, it began to philosophize. The clock thought, "I am going to tick twice every second. This means that I must tick 120 times a minute, 7,200 times every hour, 172,800 times each day. It also means that I will tick 63,072,000 times in a year!" After making these calculations, the clock collapsed with a nervous breakdown.

The owner returned the clock to the builder for repairs. While the clock was in the shop, it analyzed its problem. Eventually, it reached the conclusion that all it had to do was tick twice each second, and any self-respecting clock could do that much. The rest would take care of itself. (John E. Fellers, *Secrets for Successful Living*, Nashville: Dimensions for Living, 1993).

We can learn a simple lesson on perseverance from the clock story. When examining the enormity of its tasks, the clock had a meltdown. When the clock placed more emphasis on the future than on the present, it gave up. But when the clock focused on one second at a time, when the task at hand became the aim, when the clock concentrated on what it knew it *could* do, then the clock functioned, persevered, and survived. The clock was given hope when the perspective was altered.

There are times when we focus on our ills, hurts, and heartaches. We forget how to *function* when we obsess with our dilemmas. Sometimes it is easier to give up when we worry about what *could* happen. But the best adage is to live one second at a time, handling what is at hand right now, asking God to help us, trusting that God will provide us with new perspectives. Perseverance requires a *focus*—not on the suffering, tragedy, evil, or peril, but our *focus* should be on the fact that God loves us, that Christ died for us, and that the Holy Spirit sustains us.

When we find ourselves in the *fire*, where is *our* focus? It is easy to fixate on the negative; sometimes it takes far more energy to find the positive. But friends, the positive is *good* news. Why should I praise God *now*? Because, my perseverance is making me stronger. Every time that I can overcome with God's help, my faith is strengthened. Every time my perspective looks to Christ first and tribulation second, my character solidifies. Every time I am faced with the question, 'why should I praise God now?' I should remember the words of Paul when he said, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor governments, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, **nothing** will be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord." (Romans 8:38-39).

Paul wrote that proven perseverance produces character. The Greek word for "character" actually means a metal which has been passed through the fire so that everything base has been purged out of it. (William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975. p. 74) True character is evidenced when we persevere through suffering. Distress has a manner which brings our true character to the surface.

If our perspective is right, we'll have hope. If in our suffering, we look for the eternal not the temporary, we'll have hope. If we can take moment by moment, living one second at a time, then we'll not have to worry about what someone says about us, about potential disease, about health difficulty, about financial situations, about unruly children, about parents who did us wrong. In Philippians 4:13, Paul also wrote, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Perspective says that suffering produces hope.

So why should I praise God *now*? Because hope doesn't disappoint us. In all things, praise God because our focus should be on God's love for us. Remember that to *praise* actually means to *prize*. Why should I praise God *now*? Because before we were faced with dilemmas,

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before we got the bad news, before we saw the black cloud, before the skies became gray, before all of the heartache in our life, even before we were born, Christ died for us. We were powerless to do anything to save ourselves, and Christ did it for us, simply because he loved us.

You may feel powerless in your situation right now. You may feel that your destiny is out of your control, that your peace will be determined by someone or something else. Guess what? Because you *are* powerless, the best thing to do is to go to the Powerful One, the One who loved you so much to bring salvation, the One who sent Christ into the world.

Why should I praise God *now*? I'll give you one final reason that should be all sufficient: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That should be all the perspective we need. That should help us persevere suffering, build character, and produce hope. Thanks be to God that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That is reason enough to praise God anytime.