

PRAISE AND IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS

- A. Introduction: We are talking about our purpose as Christians. We have been created to know God and show God. This means: Live in relationship with Him and demonstrate His character and power to the world around us so others can come to know and show Him. We've made these points thus far and want to add to them in this lesson:
1. We're created to bring glory to God. Eph 1:12--So that we who first hoped in Christ—who first put our confidence in Him—[have been destined and appointed] to live for the praise of His glory. (Amp)
 - a. God is glorified when we bear much fruit (John 15:8). We bear glorifying fruit when we praise God continually (Heb 13:15).
 - b. The fact that we are meant to praise God continually means it must be more than something we do in church during a worship service or when we feel good and things are going well.
 1. To praise someone means to extol their virtues by talking about their character and their actions. To praise God means to talk about who He is and what He does.
 2. The root word for praise in Eph 1:12 and Heb 13:15 actually means to tell a story or narrative. We praise God by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
 - A. Heb 13:15 defines praise as giving thanks to His name. Name has the idea of character. God's names are a revelation of His character and His works.
 - B. Giving thanks is literally: to say the same thing as, to assent to or acknowledge. We praise God by acknowledging what He is like and what He does.
 - c. Praise is not an emotional response to God. It is the appropriate response. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for who He is and what He does. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
 2. Not only does praise glorify God, it helps us by opening the door to God's power in our circumstance.
 - a. Ps 50:23--Whoso offered praise glorifieth me (KJV) and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God (NIV).
 1. When you praise God or talk about what He is like, and talk about His past, present and future help, you magnify Him and make Him bigger in your eyes.
 2. That in turn increases your confidence, faith, and trust in Him. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith, trust, and confidence in Him. The door is opened to His help.
 - b. II Chron 20 gives us practical application of this truth. King Jehoshaphat and his people faced overwhelming odds. They fought their battle and defeated three enemy armies with praise. v27
 1. Praising God doesn't mean you deny the problem or pretend you feel good when you don't. It means you recognize that there is more to the situation than what you see and feel.
 2. Jehoshaphat and Judah knew this was an impossible situation. They were no match for the force approaching them and they were afraid. They didn't deny any of this. Instead they acknowledged God and proclaimed who He is and what He does.
 - c. What can we learn from this incident? Fight your battles with praise. Praise is a strength that stops the enemy and stills the avenger (Ps 8:2; Matt 21:16). Children can do it, not because it's necessarily easy, but because it's what we've been created to do.
- B. The response of Jehoshaphat and Judah to their situation did not come out of a vacuum. It was not a technique they used to get results. There was a whole process that brought them to the point of being able to fight with praise. Let's look further at how they handled this potentially catastrophic situation.
1. Jehoshaphat and Judah did not deny the problem they were facing or the feelings generated by the problem (v3,12). But they did something critical: They did not start out with the problem. They started with the solution. They set their focus on God and began to magnify Him.
 - a. v3--Then Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself [determinedly, as his vital need] to seek the Lord (Amp); went to the Lord for direction (Basic). He had the people fast (not as a technique to get something from God) but to help them put their attention on God.

- b. v6-9--The king gathered the people together to pray. He began by talking about God: how big He is, how He had helped them in the past, His promise to help them when they faced trouble.
 - 2. Ps 103:2--We (and they) are instructed not to forget God's benefits. The fact that we have to be exhorted not to forget means that it's possible we will forget.
 - a. Because we were created to live in a physical world we automatically gravitate to what we can see and feel. We see and feel the problem so it can seem much bigger and more powerful than God.
 - b. We have to counteract this natural tendency by making an effort to direct our attention to God. Often, going to God for help is the last thing people do after they have exhausted every natural avenue. He needs to be the first place we go for help.
 - c. We all have a natural tendency to magnify the problem. We magnify things by talking about them.
 - 1. Most of our conversation and prayer starts with how big the problem is and how bad we feel. The more we talk the bigger the problems and the feelings get.
 - 2. What if Jehoshaphat had kept going on and on about how big the enemy army was and how small Judah was compared to them? What if he kept rehearsing how awful the situation was? What if he fixated on: I can't believe these people are coming at us after the kindness we showed them? The problem would have gotten bigger and God and His help would have gotten smaller and smaller. And the door to God's help would be closing.
 - 3. Such a reaction seems right because that's how we feel and that's how things look. And, our mind races to try to figure things out and find a solution. This doesn't mean there aren't times when we talk about the trouble and how we ought to deal with it. But you have to be honest with yourself: Are you magnifying the problem or God and His power when you talk?
 - d. Jehoshaphat and Judah had to choose to magnify and focus on God with them and for them. They had to remember His past help, present provision and promise of future deliverance.
 - 3. God spoke to Judah through the prophet Jahaziel and assured His people that He would fight for them (v14-17). Then they thanked and praised God for His promise to them (v18-19).
 - a. The rest of that day and an entire night passed before they went into battle. Nothing changed in their circumstances. They had to hold on to what God had said to them.
 - 1. In the morning Jehoshaphat exhorted them to continue to believe the Word of the Lord and they would be established and prosper. v20--Hold firmly to your faith in God and you will be found firm (NAB); you will be successful (Jerusalem).
 - 2. To help them keep their focus on God and His faithfulness as they went to the battle field the king appointed praisers to proclaim the goodness of God.
 - b. v21--The king appointed singers to walk ahead of the army, singing to the Lord and praising him for his holy splendor. This is what they sang: Give thanks to the Lord; his faithful love endures forever. (NLT)
- C. This is a historical account of real people who faced real trouble and got real help from God. It was written down, in part, to reveal some things about how God works to teach and encourage succeeding generations of people, including us (Rom 15:4).
 - 1. The same words that brought Judah courage and hope can help us. God gave them specific instructions about how to face an overwhelming, potentially catastrophic circumstance. Note that He told Jehoshaphat and Judah two times: Fear not and don't be dismayed. v15,17
 - 2. We feel fear when we're threatened by something that is greater than the power and resources available to us. However, nothing can come against us that is bigger than God and His power. Those aren't just "church words". This is reality as it truly is.
 - a. When you begin to proclaim and acknowledge the fact that this "thing" you're facing isn't bigger than God (or praise the Lord) He is magnified in your eyes and your fear lessens.
 - 1. One of the most effective ways to deal with fear is to look at the worst thing that could possibly happen in the situation and ask yourself: Is it bigger than God?

2. In Judah's situation, what was the worst that could have happened? They could have all died. But that's not bigger than God. We could do entire lessons on this but consider one point.

A. We are eternal beings and, for those who know the Lord, the greater and better part of our existence is ahead, first in the present invisible Heaven and then on the new earth. Even a lifetime of suffering is nothing in comparison to what is ahead. Rom 8:18

B. Every person who lived through the circumstances described in this incident has been dead for almost 3,000 years. Are any of them upset now about what happened then?

b. I'm not arguing for trouble and suffering. I'm talking about having the right perspective as you face life's troubles. It will help you deal with fear because the worst thing that could happen is not bigger than God. And it will enable you to deal with your situation with praise to God which opens the door to His help in your situation.

1. So much of our reaction to life's trials is fear masquerading as faith. We've developed this weird theology that if we don't say anything negative we'll be okay. But that becomes denying the problem or pretending that we aren't afraid. None of that is faith.

2. If you're facing trouble, **YOU'RE FACING TROUBLE!** But it's not bigger than God.

3. God also told His people (and us) in the face of a catastrophic circumstance: Be not dismayed. Dismayed comes from a word that means to be shattered. In other words: Don't fall to pieces.

a. Don't fear or lose heart at the sight of this vast multitude (NAB); Be not afraid, Neither be discouraged (Berkeley); do not be afraid, do not be daunted (Jerusalem).

b. God told them: Don't lose hope. Hope is confident expectation of coming good. There is no such things as a hopeless situation because we serve the God of hope. Rom 15:13

1. The Bible is filled with numerous examples of people in impossible situations where the God of hope stepped in with a solution that brought deliverance to them, maximum glory to Him, maximum good to multitudes, and genuine good out of bad (whole lessons for another day).

2. Even irreversible situations are temporary in the hands of the God of hope. There is coming a day of reunion and restoration for all who know the Lord in the life to come.

4. We fulfill the commands to "fear not and be not dismayed" by praising the Lord, by acknowledging Him through talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.

D. We can learn much about the value of praising God from the Apostle Paul. He faced many adversities in his life as a Christian, but experienced God's power to lift him above it in the midst and to deliver him.

1. Paul talked about being sorrowful yet rejoicing (II Cor 6:10) and rejoicing in hope (Rom 12:12) in the face of tribulation, persecution, and adversity.

a. The word translated rejoice in both verses means to be cheerful. It doesn't mean feel cheerful because Paul said that he felt sorrow at the same time he rejoiced--II Cor 6:10--Sad men who rejoice continually (Knox). It means to be full of cheer.

b. To cheer means to give hope. When you cheer someone you encourage them with the reasons they can have hope or expectation of coming good. That's what you do when you praise the Lord.

2. The Bible gives several specific accounts of Paul in adverse conditions. Consider one. Acts 16:16-34.

1. Paul and Silas went to the city of Philippi to preach the gospel. While there, Paul cast a devil out of a servant girl. The spirit enabled her to tell fortunes and her masters made money off of her "gift". The men were angry and reported Paul and Silas to city officials as trouble makers. They were arrested, beaten, and jailed. The two praised God and were supernaturally delivered.

a. Did Paul and Silas like what happened to them or feel good about being beaten and jailed for setting a captive free in the name of Jesus? It's highly unlikely. But praise isn't an emotional response to God. It's the appropriate response no matter what we face.

1. We don't have the specifics of how the two prayed and praised. But it is reasonable to presume their prayer followed the pattern of Jehoshaphat's prayer. They magnified God.

2. They would have known about the incident in II Chron. They also knew Ps 34:1 and Ps

119:62--His praise shall continually be in my mouth. At midnight I will give thee thanks.

- b. Paul and Silas praised God and opened the door to His salvation in their situation. God was also glorified. The jailer and his household were saved (v27-34). Tradition tells us that the jailer became the pastor of the church Paul established at Philippi.
 3. Paul was later imprisoned in Rome, facing possible execution. He wrote his epistle to the Philippians from jail. It gives us insight into his view of reality. Praise to God in the face of trouble is not a technique we use to “fix things”. It comes out of our perspective.
 - a. This is a real person facing real trouble. But there is no hint of fear or dismay in his letter.
 1. Although Paul was not executed at that time, he did not know when he wrote the letter that he would be going free.
 2. Paul understood that the worst thing that could happen in his situation (death) is not bigger than God. He told the Philippians that to die is gain and to depart and be with Christ is far better. Therefore he had hope. Therefore he did not need to fear. Phil 1:21-23
 - b. Paul had an eternal perspective. He saw his life and his situation from the standpoint of eternity.
 1. II Cor 4:17--In the context of the many hardships he endured as he preached the gospel, Paul called such difficulties momentary and light.
 - A. Paul understood that he was an eternal being. The greater and better part of his life was ahead after this life. Even a lifetime of suffering, in comparison to eternity, is nothing.
 - B. Therefore he was not weighed down by the troubles he faced. It doesn't mean he liked or enjoyed them. It means that because of his perspective he was neither afraid or hopeless.
 2. II Cor 4:18--Paul maintained his perspective by mentally considering unseen realities. Look means to heed, to contemplate. Paul looked past his circumstances and focused on Almighty God's power, provision, and promise.
 - c. Praise to God (proclaiming who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do) helped Paul keep his focus on God. Phil 4:4
 1. Paul rejoiced or cheered himself by talking about why he had hope even in a hopeless situation.
 2. The word “joy” is used five times in Philippians and the word “rejoice” is used eleven times.
- E. Conclusion: We have much more to say. But consider these thoughts as we close. There's no such thing as a hopeless situation for those who know the Lord. You may not know what to do but God does. This may be impossible for you but it's not for God. If you will learn to answer your circumstance with praise and magnify God by talking about His bigness and His love, it will lessen the fear and dismay that can overwhelm you. It will glorify God and prepare the way for Him to show you His salvation. More next week!