

PRAISE HELPS US FOCUS

- A. Introduction: We are discussing the fact that we have been created to know God and then show Him to the world around us. We do this by living in a way that brings glory to Him (Eph 1:12). One of the primary ways we bring glory to God is through praising Him.
1. Praise is more than playing music and singing songs. Praise is more than responding emotionally to God when we feel good and things are going well.
 - a. We're not really talking about what we do in church on Sunday. We're talking about how you respond to God in your daily life as you face the many challenges that come your way.
 - b. To praise God, in its most basic form, means to talk about who He is and what He has done, is doing and will do, to commend Him for His character and His works. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
 - c. Praise is the appropriate response to God. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
 1. Not only does praise glorify God, it opens the door to His help in our circumstances. 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)
 2. Praise is a valuable weapon we can use in life's challenges. We can fight life's battles with praise to God. It is a strength that stops the enemy and stills the avenger. Ps 8:2; Matt 21:16
 2. We've been looking at a spectacular example of how praise to God in the face of trouble glorifies God and opens the door to His power to help us. II Chron 20:1-30
 - a. King Jehoshaphat and the nation of Judah faced overwhelming odds when three enemy armies came together to attack. These were real people facing a real problem and got real help from God.
 1. They didn't deny their problem nor pretend that they weren't afraid. But they didn't start out with the problem. They started with the solution. They turned their attention to God.
 2. They magnified God by talking about how big and powerful He is, how He had helped them in the past and promised to help them when they were in trouble.
 3. When they went to the battle field they put the praisers who proclaimed the goodness and faithfulness of God out ahead of the army. They defeated the enemy with praise. v27
 - b. God was glorified. His people won a mighty victory by His power and surrounding nations recognized that Jehovah was (is) the true God, the God of gods. v29
 3. In this lesson we want to continue to discuss the importance of responding to life's challenges with praise to God so we can glorify Him and open the door to His power in our lives.
- B. Rom 15:4--Much of what was recorded in the Old Testament was written to help succeeding generations by teaching them (and us) and giving them (and us) reasons to stay faithful and expectant. The incident in II Chronicles is a vivid illustration of how to respond to an overwhelming, impossible situation.
1. II Chron 20:14--When Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah sought God, He spoke to them through His prophet Jahaziel. God first gave them His Word.
 - a. v15--He said: Fear not nor be dismayed because of this great impossibility coming against you.
 1. Fear is generated when what is coming against us is greater than the power and resources available to us. Dismay arises when we are facing a hopeless situation.
 2. God was not requiring them to deny their feelings. Feelings are stimulated by what we see, so as long as we see troubling circumstances we will feel negative emotions.
 - A. We fulfill this command (fear not nor be dismayed) by praising God or acknowledging Him through talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing and will do.
 - B. Praise keeps God's power and character before our eyes. Praise magnifies God in our eyes which increases our faith and trust in Him. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith.
 - b. v15--God said "the battle is not yours but mine". The Lord didn't say that to fire them up. He was

stating the way things really are. God said: You can't do anything about this situation, but I can.

1. v16,17--God instructed them: Go down to the field tomorrow. Meet the enemy at the end of the valley. You won't need to fight this battle. I'll be with you.

2. These aren't "church words". The point is: What you can't do, I can do. v17--Take your position, stand still, and see the deliverance (salvation) of the Lord [Who is] with you. (Amp)

2. For us, the statement that "God is with us and will fight for us" is little more than a cliché. Let's consider what it meant to these people in II Chronicles to have God with them. These words were part of their history.

a. Ex 3:11,12--When God commissioned Moses to lead Israel out of slavery in Egypt and Moses asked: How can I do that? (In other words, it's impossible.) God told him: I will be with you.

(In impossible circumstances I am with you.)

1. Ex 3:14--Then the Lord gave Moses His name. I Am that I Am, meaning: I am what you need me to be when you need me to be it. (His names are a revelation of His character.)

2. Over a period of nine months God demonstrated His power in mighty ways and persuaded Pharaoh to let His people leave. (The impossible made possible.)

b. Once they left Egypt Israel found themselves trapped at the Red Sea with Pharaoh (who had changed his mind about letting them go) pursuing them. Ex 14:13,14

1. In the face of an impossible situation (trapped at the Red Sea) God told them: Fear not. Stand still and see My salvation. I will fight for you. These aren't "church words".

2. This is Almighty God telling His people: No point in you fighting this battle. You can't do it. But I can. The Red Sea is not bigger than Me. It's impossible for you, but not for Me.

A. God actually used the problem (the Red Sea) to solve the problem. He parted the waters, Israel walked through on dry ground, and the sea closed over the Egyptians.

B. The mightiest army in the world at that time (which would have been a constant source of trouble to Israel because Canaan was only eleven days away from Egypt) was defeated.

3. Israel could have actually praised God at the Red Sea for the Red Sea because in the hands of God who was with them the problem became the solution.

c. The point is: The battle is not ours but His because we can't do it. Do what you can do and God will do the rest. What can we do? Praise the Lord.

3. Those people at the Red Sea didn't know what God was going to do but Jehoshaphat did and we do because the Holy Spirit inspired men to record this incident to help us. This is the context in which Judah would have heard: God is with you and He will fight for you. He will do what you can't do.

a. God's written record up to the time of Jehoshaphat and Judah included numerous examples of God with His people doing the impossible for them. Judah owed its very existence to an impossibility made possible by the God of the impossible.

b. They were all direct descendants of Abraham. Almost a thousand years earlier God spoke to Abraham and told him that he was going to father a multitude and the Redeemer of mankind

would come through his descendants.

1. Abraham and his wife Sarah were too old to produce children. They couldn't do it when they were younger because she had been barren.

2. The very first time the statement "There's nothing bigger than God" appears is in connection with barren, elderly people producing an offspring. Gen 18:14

4. Jehoshaphat and Judah would have heard the Lord's message through His prophet in this context: I am with you as what you need in this situation. It is impossible for you, but not for Me. This is not bigger than Me. I will make a way where there seems to be no way. Because they had example after example in their historical record of God coming through for His people in impossible situations they had every reason to praise Him before they saw His salvation because they knew they would see it.

C. The difficulty arises out of the fact that we are so tied to what we see and feel. And, until there is a change

in what we see we will have to battle with our emotions. That's why praise is such a powerful weapon.

1. When we acknowledge God and talk about who He is -- His bigness, His power -- it increases our trust and helps us stay focused. As we've stated, much of what is written in the Old Testament was recorded to teach us how to deal with life. Back to Israel at the edge of the Red Sea:
 - a. When these people found themselves at the edge of the sea with the Egyptian army in pursuit they were terrified (Ex 14:10-12). They did what many of us do. They began to magnify the problem: We're going to die! We should have stayed in slavery in Egypt! It was better than this.
 - b. Notice what Moses, under the inspiration of God, instructed them to do. v14--He'll fight for you "and you shall hold your peace and remain at rest (Amp); You have only to keep still (Moffatt); remain quiet (ABPS); Be ye therefore silent (Sept)".
 1. These people did not know what we know. We have much more revelation from God than they had. But He was trying to help and teach them. Don't keep talking like you're talking.
 2. God wasn't giving them a technique to solve the problem. He wasn't being a "confession policeman"--just don't say anything negative. He was building it into their consciousness:

When what you see and feel is overwhelming focus your attention on Me. I am with you to help you. Praising God helps you focus on reality as it truly is. God with you.
 - c. Jehoshaphat no doubt gleaned from these instructions that it would be good for us to praise God in our situation. As we've pointed out, they began by magnifying God. II Chron 20:6-9
 1. Once God spoke to them, all of them thanked and praised God (v18,19). But in the morning, as they went up to the battlefield, Jehoshaphat instructed them to praise the Lord.
 2. He was harnessing everyone's attention and helping them focus on God and His help as they marched toward an impossible and as yet unchanged circumstance.
2. We've made this point repeatedly. When we talk about praising God we aren't telling you to deny that you have a problem. Because of the nature of life in a sin cursed earth troubles are inevitable. But we have to learn to talk about them in terms of the way things really are and not just how they look.
 - a. God is with us to help us. God is omnipresent. There's no place God is not. In Him we live and move and have our being. Wherever you go, there He is. His presence is salvation (Jer 23:24; Acts 17:28; Ps 42:5). When you begin to talk about Him (His character and His power) or praise Him you open the door to His help in your situation.
 - b. When the generation delivered from Egypt by God's power made it to the border of the land of Canaan they refused to actually enter the land because it was an impossible situation. Num 13,14
 1. That was the case, but God intended that what He had done for them up to that point would encourage them that He would help them now.
 2. Only Joshua and Caleb brought up the fact that God was with them and that this situation was not impossible because it wasn't bigger than God (13:30; 14:9). Those two saw the same overwhelming circumstances as the rest of Israel. But they remembered God.
 3. Ps 77:11--The basic meaning of remember indicates a process of mentioning or recalling either silently, verbally or by means of a memorial sing or symbol. Praise helps us remember.
3. We aren't talking about "getting your praise on" in church. Once Israel was through the Red Sea they had a marvelous praise service. It had all worked out and they felt good (Ex 15:1-21). The problem is, once their circumstances and feelings changed they forgot what God had done for them.
 - a. Ex 15:22-26--Israel began their journey to Canaan, went three days without water, and when they found water at Marah, it was undrinkable. They began to complain (v24). Complaining talks only about what it seems without bringing God into the discussion.
 - b. You have to make an effort to call to memory what God has done for you when new troubles arise. They were in a serious situation, but God had helped them mightily three days before.
 1. Ps 106:13,21--They forgot His works. Forget is from a word that means to mislay or to be oblivious from want of memory or attention.
 2. Ps 103:2--We have to make an effort to remember what God has done. Praise helps us do so.

- c. Joshua and Caleb kept singing the song of praise, kept expressing the truths that were proclaimed at the celebration at the Red Sea. By the time they reached Canaan they had a confidence that no matter what they might encounter, it wouldn't be bigger than God.
- 4. God is the God of the impossible. All He asks from us is to believe Him. All things are possible to him who believes the God of the impossible.
 - a. When Mary asked Gabriel how she could have a child without a man the angel replied: Luke 1:37--With God nothing is ever impossible, and no word from God shall be without power or impossible of fulfillment. (Amp)
 - b. A father faced with an impossible situation (a son afflicted with an evil spirit) asked Jesus: Can you do anything for us? His answer was: I'm the God of the impossible. Just believe Me. Mark 9:23--And Jesus said, [You say to Me], If You can do anything? [Why,] all things can be—are possible—to him who believes! (Amp)
 - c. Praise is the language of faith. Faith believes what it cannot see based on the Word of God who cannot lie. Praising God for His help before you see it is an expression of faith. If you believe you will see His help.
- D. Conclusion: The things that were recorded in the Old Testament were meant to help each succeeding generation. Jehoshaphat and Judah had enough information about God's help in impossible situations to empower them to stand in the face of their impossible situation.
 - 1. We have even more information because we have the revelation given to us in the New Testament. Consider some comments about Abraham as he faced his impossible situation.
 - a. Rom 4:18,19--When there was no reason to be hopeful, he expected God to keep His Word. Abraham did not deny that he and Sarah were too old to have children. He realized that their condition was not bigger than God.
 - b. Rom 4:20--No unbelief or distrust made him (Abraham) waver or doubtfully question concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong and was empowered by faith as he gave praise and glory to God. (Amp)
 - c. Rom 4:21--(Abraham was) fully satisfied and assured that God was able and mighty to keep His Word and to do what He had promised. (Amp)
 - 2. Praise helps us focus on God and His bigness. If we will develop the habit of talking about God and His power in the face of our impossible situation our trust and confidence in God will increase. We will glorify Him and prepare the way for Him to show us His salvation. More next week!