

PRAISE STILL THE ENEMY

- A. Introduction: We are talking about learning to praise God continually (Heb 13:15; Ps 34:1). Praise to God in its most basic form is acknowledging God by talking about who He is and what He has done, is doing and will do. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for His character and works.
1. We live in a world that has been damaged by sin. When Adam sinned a curse of corruption and death entered the world. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12,19; etc.
    - a. We must daily deal with the effects of this curse earth making life difficult for all of us. John 16:33
      1. Moths and rust corrupt; thieves break through and steal (Matt 6:19). Material things wear out.
    2. Storms and natural disasters wreak havoc. People with fallen natures and/or unrenewed minds make choices that affect our lives negatively, sometimes in unalterable ways.
      - b. However, the Bible gives us very specific instructions as to how we are to deal with life's trials: It tells us to be of good cheer (John 16:33) and count it all joy (James 1:2).
        1. Cheer comes from a word that means to have courage. Courage is mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty (Webster's Dictionary).
        2. Count comes from a word that means consider. Joy comes from a word that means to be cheerful or full of cheer. Cheer is a state of mind as opposed to a feeling. When you cheer someone you encourage them with the reasons why they can have hope.
  2. This is not emotional responses to your troubles. It's a volitional choice, an act of your will.
    - a. The Apostle Paul talked about being sorrowful yet rejoicing (II Cor 6:10, same word as used in James 1:2). Although Paul felt sorrow because of what he was facing he made a choice to rejoice.
    - b. Hab 3:18--The prophet Habakkuk was facing the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple along with the end Israel as a nation and life as he had known it.
      1. Yet he declared: **I WILL** rejoice in the Lord and I will joy in God. I choose, I resolve, I am determined. I will be joyful as opposed to feel joyful. I make a choice to rejoice.
      2. In the next verse he rejoiced. He talked about who God is and what He does. Note that even though he was facing an irreversible circumstance, the prophet had hope. v19--The Lord God is my strength and will guide my feet to the end. He maketh me walk in high places; that I may triumph with his song. (Septuagint)
    - c. This is not a technique or formula to end your troubles. It's based on your perception of reality: No matter what comes against me, it's not bigger than God.
      1. There's no such things as an impossible situation with the God to whom all things are possible. Gen 18:14; Luke 1:37; etc.
      2. There's no such thing as an irreversible or hopeless situation because we serve the God of hope. All will be made right, some in this life and some in the life to come. Rom 15:13
  3. When you learn to praise God all the time no matter what you glorify Him and you open the door to His power and help in your life. Ps 50:23
- B. James 1:2-4--In order to respond to life's trials with praise there are some things we must know. We must understand that the trying of our faith works patience.
1. Last week we cleared up some common misunderstandings of this passage. Let's briefly review.
    - a. Trial don't come from God nor do they make us patient. Trials are part of life in a sin cursed earth. Trials give an opportunity to work or exercise patience or cheerful, hopeful endurance. If you stay faithful to God (endure, exercise patience) you will see His deliverance.
    - b. People mistakenly say that God tests us with trials, but that is not true. God doesn't need to test us. He already knows what we will and won't do. Jesus (who is God and shows us God by doing His works) never tested anyone with trials in His earth ministry. (Whole lessons for another day).
      1. However, trials do test our faith in the sense that when troubles come, what we truly believe about God along with the depth of our commitment to Him gets exposed.

2. It's easy to believe God's Word when all is well. It's easy to stay faithful to God when it's easy and feels good. The challenge is staying faithful when it's hard and it hurts.
2. It's important that we understand how our faith gets tested in trials so we can pass the tests. When troubles come people tend to focus on: Why is this happening? What is God doing? What is He saying to me?
  - a. As we've stated, tests and trials don't come from God. They are part of life in a fallen world. Nor does God speak to us through circumstances. He speaks to us through His written Word, the Bible (whole lesson for another day). When you encounter a trial His message to you is: Count it all joy or consider this an occasion to respond with praise to Me.
  - b. People often go to the other extreme to explain life's hardships, wrongly believing everything bad that happens is caused by the devil: The devil made my car overheat. They end up talking more about the devil and his power than about God and more time rebuking Satan than praising God.
    1. As the first rebel in the universe Satan is ultimately responsible for all the hell and heartache in this world, but neither does he orchestrate circumstances. Bad stuff happens because that's life in a sin cursed earth. God didn't do it. The devil didn't do it.
    2. Having said that, it's clear from scripture that the devil does works in life's trials and we need to know how he works.
3. Jesus a parable about a sower sowing the word to illustrate how the kingdom of God would function during the time between His first and second coming (Matt 13:18-23; Mark 4:14-20; Luke 8:10-15).
  - a. In this period the kingdom will advance through the proclaiming of the Word of God. His Word will have varying degrees of effects on different people for a variety of reasons. He compared it to seed sown by the wayside, on rocky ground, among thorns, and finally on good ground.
    1. There's much in it we aren't going to discuss but consider some points relevant to our topic. Jesus said that Satan comes to steal the Word of God. Matt 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12
    2. HE uses the realities of life in a sin cursed earth to do it: when people don't understand what they hear, when they are distracted by the cares and pleasures of this life (lessons for another day) and when tribulation, persecution (Matt 13:21) and affliction (Mark 4:17) arise.
  - b. Paul preached the gospel in the city of Thessalonica. He was only there three weeks when severe persecution broke out and he was forced to leave. After a period of time he sent Timothy to them to establish and encourage them in their faith. I Thess 3:1-5
    1. Note, Paul was concerned that some might be moved or shaken by these afflictions or persecutions (same word used in Matt 13:21 and Mark 4:17) they were facing.
    2. Note also, Paul was concerned that the tempter (Satan) had tempted them and his labor among them (proclaiming the Word of God) was being undone (the Word stolen from them).
4. Paul wrote much about how the devil works. He said Satan works on our minds. Paul never exhorts believers to beware of the devil's power or his ability to orchestrate circumstances. He exhorts believers to beware of the devil's mental tactics.
  - a. II Cor 11:3--Paul was concerned that the Corinthians would be beguiled or deceived by the devil just as Eve was. When we look back at Gen 3:1-6 we find that the devil presented her with lies.
    1. A lie is anything that contradicts God's Word. The devil misquoted God (v1), contradicted God's Word to her (v4), and attacked God's character (v5).
    2. The devil engaged her on a mental level, enticed her to focus on what she could see and how it made her feel and stole God's Word from her by persuading her to abandon it through deceit.
  - b. Satan's only power over Christians is to get us to believe a lie and then act on it. Our defense is the truth of God's Word. Eph 6:11
    1. Paul told believers that we stand against, resist the wiles (strategies, schemes, cunning devices) with the armor of God (His Word). Our defense is the truth, accurate, complete knowledge of God's word. Ps 91:4--Your faithful promises are my armor. (TLB)
    2. Eph 6:11--Put on God's whole armor...that you may be able to successfully stand up against

[all] the strategies and deceits of the devil. (Amp)

c. Matt 4:1-11--We see this played out in Jesus' life. The tempter (the devil) came to Him to steal the Word with mental strategies: half truths, misquotes and lies.

1. The devil challenged Jesus' identity according to God (Matt 3:17; 4:3), misquoted scripture (Ps 91:11,12; Matt 4:6), and enticed Him with the glory and power of this world (Matt 4:8,9).

In each temptation Jesus acknowledged God through His Word: It is written.

2. The devil had no direct power to stop Jesus' ministry or kill him. (He had to inspire men to rise up and crucify Jesus, Luke 22:3; etc.) So Satan tried to entice Jesus into doing it Himself through lies and half truths. And, Satan came to Jesus when He was more vulnerable: He was hungry after a forty day fast.

A. We're more vulnerable to Satan's lies when we're stirred up emotionally and physically, we feel bad and things aren't going well or are crashing down around us.

B. In the hard times we get hit with: Is this Christian stuff even real? Is God real? Why not kill myself and end all this pain? It's not worth it to serve God. My prayer didn't get answered. God has let me down. I had it better before I became a Christian.

5. You must understand some thing things about your mind. There's a lot going on in there. The devil takes advantage of our ignorance about how our minds work. What you believe and how you act is based on what you think. These are whole lessons for another day, but consider these thoughts.

a. We all have a perspective or view of reality. It's been built into us over our lifetime. How accurate and healthy our view is depends on the information and experiences we've been exposed to. We have learned thinking patterns that affect how we deal with life.

1. If you were raised in a dysfunctional home and told you were no good or unwanted you will deal with life from that perspective.

2. All of us are warped in our thinking to one degree or another because we were raised by flawed parents in a sin cursed earth. That's why our minds must be renewed (Rom 12:2). We have to identify and straighten out thinking patterns that are contrary to God's Word.

b. We all talk to ourselves all the time (it's called self-talked). What we say to ourselves is based on our picture of reality. We have to become aware of what we tell ourselves and learn to say to ourselves what God says about everything.

c. We all have random thoughts that don't initiate with us. For example, you're standing in the checkout line at the Quick Shop and the thought runs through your mind: Steal that candy bar. It is quickly followed by another thought: What kind of Christian are you? You probably not saved.

1. Those thoughts didn't originate with you. They are fiery darts from the enemy (Eph 6:16). His goal is to entice you to accept the thought, make it your own and then act on it.

2. This is very simple illustration, but it is a good example of how the devil works on our minds when trials come our way and we are at our most vulnerable.

3. We are vulnerable because trials make it look as though God has forgotten you and His Word is not true. It is easier to give into the mental strategies of the devil.

6. Praise stops the enemy and stills the avenger (Ps 8:2; Matt 21:16) because praise to God helps us with the mental battle with the devil. Talk to yourself about God.

a. Acknowledging God by talking about who His is and what He has done, is doing, and will do keeps your mind focused on the way things really are and helps you resist the fiery darts of the enemy.

b. It gets your focus on God's power and bigness in your situation. It magnified God in your eyes and increases your faith and trust in Him. Praise is the voice of faith. Faith opens the door to God's power in your situation. Ps 50:23

C. Conclusion: The things we are discussing in this part of our series look good on paper and sound good in church. Most of us would agree it that praising God is something we should all do more of.

1. The problem is: When you most need to do it, it feels like a ridiculous thing to do because you are facing and feeling something real, something big and bad.
  - a. That's why this won't work as a technique to end your trial or get you out of trouble. It has to come out of your perception of reality.
    1. You must become convinced that nothing can come against you that is bigger than God and nothing is impossible or irreversible so there is always hope.
    2. This kind of persuasion comes from feeding on God's Word. The greatest gift you can give yourself is to become a regular, systematic reader of the New Testament. Read it from beginning to end, over and over. Matt 4:4; I Thess 2:13; II Cor 3:18; etc.
      - A. Don't worry about what you don't understand. Understanding comes with familiarity.
      - B. It is a supernatural book and will work in you and change you even though you don't understand how it works or exactly what it's doing. You will be changed for the better.
  - b. When Jesus told the parable about the sower sowing the word He referred to people in whom the Word of God is stolen because it did not take root.
    1. Matt 13:19--By the wayside. Jesus said these people hear but don't understand. Many people have no real interest in learning and understanding God's Word. They want the one verse that will solve their problem. That would be like someone saying: Teach me to read these words: SEE THE CAT as opposed to: Teach me to read. Which is the more helpful skill?!
    2. Matt 13:20,21--On rocky ground. These people are stirred up emotionally by what they hear, but when the feelings go, they are gone. They never became persuaded to the point where they weren't moved by what they see and feel.
2. No matter what comes your way, learn to respond with: This isn't bigger than God. When thoughts of fear and doubt rise up, talk about how big and good God is.
  - a. Become aware of and honestly assess how much you talk about what you see and feel in the mess as opposed to how much you talk about God, His bigness and His power.
  - b. And, honestly assess this: Are you talking more about what the devil is doing than what God is doing?
3. Note two things Paul said to the Thessalonians (the people being persecuted): Rejoice evermore. Give thanks always. I Thess 5:16,18
  - a. Rejoice is from the same word used in James 1:2 and II Cor 6:10. Cheer yourself with the reasons you have hope. Thanks means be grateful. There's always something to be grateful for in every circumstances: what God has done, is doing and will do.
  - b. We need to learn to respond to life's trials with praise to God and silence the devil's schemes. More next week!!