

PRAISE PROTECTS THE WORD

- A. Introduction: We're talking about the importance of learning to praise God continually (Heb 13:15; Ps 34:1). To praise the Lord means to acknowledge Him by talking about who He is and what He does. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for His character and His works (Ps 107:8,15,21,31).
1. We think of praising God as something we do when we feel good and all is well. But the Bible tells us to praise God in the face of life's challenges. James 1:2-4
 - a. Gods says: When you encounter a trial, count or consider it an occasion to joy or rejoice. Joy comes from a word that means to be full of cheer.
 1. This isn't an emotional response. Paul used the same word when he wrote of being sorrowful yet rejoicing in the face of troubles (II Cor 6:10). When you cheer someone (including yourself) you encourage them by giving them reasons they can have hope in their situation.
 2. This is a response based on knowledge: You have hope because you know that if you endure (patience is hopeful endurance) you will see the Lord's provision in your circumstance.
 - b. Praising God in the face of trouble comes out of and is based on your perception of reality. You know that nothing can come against you that is bigger than God, and you realize there's more to life than just this life. Therefore nothing is impossible or completely irreversible. All will be made right by God's power either in this life or the life to come. There's always hope.
 2. To respond to life's trials with praise we must understand the parameters of life in a sin cursed earth.
 - a. Responding with praise is difficult if you have false expectations. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean a "problem free" life. There's no such thing as a life without troubles. We live in a world damaged by sin, making life a struggle for all. John 16:33; Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12-19; etc.
 - b. You must know that trials don't come from God (Ps 34:17-19; II Tim 3:11). They are part of life in a fallen world. If you don't understand this, instead of praising God, you'll focus on: Why is this happening? What's God doing? What's He trying to say to me? What have I done wrong?
 - c. Neither does the devil directly cause the all bad circumstances of life. But he does work in life's trials. In this lesson we're going to continue our discussion of how the devil works in our hard times so we can stand recognize his tactics and silence him with praise to God. Ps 8:2; Matt 21:16
- B. According to Jesus the devil attempts to steal God's Word from us and he uses the realities of life in a sin cursed earth to help him do it. Mark 4:14-17; Matt 13:20,21
1. Jesus said some people are offended when troubles come. Offended means to be led astray or into sin.
 - a. It comes from the Greek word SKANDALON which literally means the trigger of a trap on which bait is placed which, when touched, springs and causes the trap to close ensnaring the animal.
 1. Nowhere does the Bible tell Christians to beware of the devil's power. Rather it tells us to beware of his mental strategies (schemes, tricks). Eph 6:11
 2. He presents us with lies about God, ourselves and our circumstances in an attempt to persuade us to disbelieve or disobey the Lord. When we accept Satan's lies and act on them we give up God's Word. We are trapped, not by Satan's power, but through his strategies.
 - b. It's easy to believe what God says when we feel good and all is well. But we're more vulnerable to the devil's lies and tricks when we're dealing with tribulation, affliction and persecution and are stirred up emotionally and physically.
 1. I Thess 3:1-5--When persecution broke out in the city of Thessalonica Paul was concerned that people would be shaken by their trials or moved away from the Word of God. Note, he was aware that the tempter (the devil) would be working on them. (More on this later.)
 2. II Cor 2:11--Paul wrote that we are not to be ignorant of Satan's devices. Devices comes from a word meaning that which is thought out, planned, devised: his designs (Basic); scheming (Berkeley). Paul said if we are unaware of how the devil works he'll take advantage of us.
 2. If you are going to resist the bait of Satan (his lies) you must recognize that not everything in your mind

is your idea. Many Christians don't realize that they have "help" with their thought life.

- a. In the same letter where Paul warned us not to be ignorant of how the devil works he pointed out that Eve was beguiled (seduced or deceived) by the devil through subtlety (trickery). II Cor 11:3
- b. Satan did not overwhelm Eve with his power. He engaged her mentally and talked her into doing what he wanted. He used trickery, deception and lies to do it. Gen 3:1-6
 1. Satan misquoted God's Word (v1) and then directly contradicted it (v4). Next, he attacked the Lord's character, implying that God was withholding something wonderful from them (v5).
 2. Lastly, the devil planted a thought of discontent: You don't have all you need. Something is missing from your life. If you do what I am suggesting, you'll gain that "something" (v5).
3. We picture the way the devil works based on horror movies we've seen. But this was all very natural. Satan spoke to Eve in words and tones which she easily received. Nothing about this conversation made her recoil. The devil still works this way. He presents us with thoughts that sound like us talking to us. It isn't scary or weird. It's normal. Consider another example.
 - a. Matt 16:21-23--Jesus began to reveal to His disciples that He was going to be rejected by Israel's leaders and killed. Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him saying: That will never happen!
 1. This seemed like a reasonable reaction based on what Jesus just said. But note that Jesus commanded Satan to leave Him revealing that Peter's idea actually originated with the devil.
 2. Note, Peter had just declared that Jesus is the Christ (v13-17) a revelation he got from God and he's committed to Jesus. Yet he's now speaking out a thought that came from Satan.
 - b. Jesus recognized that Peter's idea (the devil's) was contrary to the will and Word of God. Jesus came to earth to die (Heb 9:26-28; etc). Note how Jesus responded: You (Satan) are an offense (SKANDALON) to me (v23). Satan set another trap for Jesus to try to neutralize His ministry just as he did when Jesus spent forty days in the Judean wilderness (Matt 4:1-11).
4. Nobody fully understands the dynamics of the unseen realm and how spirits are able to interact with us. But it's clear from scripture they can and do influence our thought life. Consider these points.
 - a. Eph 6:12--Paul wrote that we wrestle with spirits beings in the unseen realm. Wrestle comes from a word meaning to sway or vibrate. These beings attempt to sway us from God's Word.
 - b. The devil has no more power or authority over Christians because we've been delivered from his kingdom and dominion through the Cross and new birth. Col 1:13; 2:15; Eph 1:20-23; etc.
 1. But he is able to influence us through thoughts presented to our minds either directly or indirectly. Satan can't make us do anything. He has to talk us into doing it through trickery.
 2. (A quick note of explanation. Very few people deal directly with Satan. We deal with lesser fallen angels. However, the name Satan is often used in a generic sense for all evil spirits.)
 - c. It's not hard for the devil to trick and trap Christians with his lies for several reasons.
 1. God's Word (the truth) is our protection (armor) against lies from the devil because it helps us recognize and resist his untruths. Eph 4:11; Ps 91:4
 - A. Eph 6:13--Wherefore, take up with you to the battle the whole armor of God (His Word), that you may be able to withstand them (tactics of these unseen beings) in the evil day, and, having overthrown them all, to stand unshaken. (Conybeare)
 - B. But most of us are ignorant of the Bible. Most of what we know are verses taken out of context. That's why regular systematic reading of the New testament is so important.
 2. Satan knows our flaws and weaknesses because he's been around humans since the beginning, practicing his tactics for almost ten thousand years. He knows what buttons to push.
 - A. The Bible refers to familiar spirits who assist mediums (Isa 8:19; 19:3; 29:4). They know things, not because they are omniscient, but because they're familiar with human behavior.
 - B. All of us are warped in our soul to one degree or another because we were raised by flawed parents in a sin cursed earth. If you were raised in a dysfunctional home and told you were no good or unwanted you will deal with life from that perspective and be

vulnerable to thoughts that reinforce your erroneous view of reality.

1. 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. (Whole lessons for another day.)

2. Peter had a pride and a commitment issue (Matt 26:33-35) leading him to rebuke Jesus instead of trusting His Word. The devil took advantage of it in this situation.

d. Satan tries to undermine our trust in God and persuade us to disbelieve and disobey God's Word. He tries to isolate us from other believers. He bombards us with thoughts hoping that we'll accept one of them and act on it. We've all been tempted, all experienced thoughts like these:

1. You're the only one dealing with this. No one understands what you're going through.

People would think you're a horrible, crazy person if they knew the issues you struggle with.

2. 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.

3. That person hurt me. I deserve to pay him back or commit this sin. This is all God's fault.

I'm the worst Christian ever. I'm probably not saved. God loves others more than me. I'm too messed up for Him to help or love. All these fake Christians are hypocrites.

C. We could do many lessons on how to deal with our mind, but consider this: Praise can help you win this battle in your mind. Talking about who God is and what He has done, is doing and will do (praising Him) helps you keep your focus on Him in the hard times even if you don't know the Bible that well.

1. Back to the Thessalonians, the people experiencing persecution. They were new Christians and Paul spent only a short time with them before persecution forced him out of town. They don't know much yet. So Paul sent Timothy to them to comfort (encourage) them in their faith. I Thess 3:2

a. Remember Paul is the one who wrote that he rejoiced or cheered himself in the face of trials (II Cor 6:10). He recounted the reasons he had hope in his situation. He knew the power of praise.

b. Although they were new Christians they already have plenty to encourage themselves with (rejoice about). They'd been delivered from idol worship. They now knew the true God. They were expecting Jesus to come back for them, with their departed loved ones. I Thess 1:9,10; 4:13-18

1. No doubt Timothy encouraged or cheered them with these realities. Note two things Paul said to the Thessalonians: Rejoice evermore. Give thanks always. I Thess 5:16,18

2. Rejoice is from the same word used in James 1:2 and II Cor 6:10. Rejoice means 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.

c. That's how praise to God works. When everything in you wants to fall apart you make the choice to rejoice. You exercise your will and acknowledge God in your circumstance. It puts your focus on Him and takes your attention off the fiery darts of the wicked one. It keeps you from engaging with the devil and taking the bait of his lies.

2. Remember Eve? She dealt with Satan's strategies by focusing on what she could see and how it made her feel (Gen 3:6). And the devil stole God's Word through his deceit. That's what happened to the generation of Israel that came out of bondage in Egypt.

a. God, through His prophet Moses, told them from the beginning that He would deliver them out of Egyptian slavery and bring them into the land of Canaan. Ex 3:7,8; 6:6-8

1. They saw and experienced God deliver them. Over a nine month period He demonstrated His power and convinced Pharaoh to release His people. Once they were past the Red Sea Israel had a marvelous praise celebration. Ex 15:1-21

2. The celebration was inspired by what they saw and how they felt in the moment. Nothing wrong with that. By all means praise God when all is well and you feel good.

b. But when they reached the border of Canaan and heard the report of twelve spies sent in to check

out the land, their faith was tested by what the spies saw and heard: There are walled cities, warlike tribes and giant warriors in the land. They concluded they couldn't take the land.

1. In their praise celebration at the Red Sea they rightly proclaimed that the people of Canaan (Palestina) would hear what God had done and be afraid before Israel arrived. They declared that God would bring them into the land and plant them there. Ex 15:14-18

2. Yet at the border of Canaan, instead of praising and acknowledging God they were crying that He brought them to this place to be killed by the Canaanite swords. Num 14:1-3

3. How did they get to that point? They had help from the devil. How do we know? Because the Bible says we all get tempted with the same sorts of things. They were bombarded with the same thoughts you and I get. I Cor 10:13

c. How could Israel have prevented this? On the journey from Egypt to Canaan they could have developed a habit of praising God by talking about what He had done, was doing and would do.

1. What had God done? He kept His Word and marvelously delivered them from Egyptian slavery. What was He doing? Even though they were traveling through a desert region to a place they'd never been, God was leading and guiding them and providing them with all that they needed to make the journey. What was He going to do? Bring them into the land by defeating their enemies just as He promised. They could have encouraged themselves with these truths.

2. Had they done that continuously during the two years it took them to get from Egypt to Canaan they would have been able to silence the voice of their senses (what they could see and feel) and stop the fiery darts from the wicked one. They would not have been talked out of God's Word, God's promise to bring them into this of plenty. The devil could not have stopped them from conquering the land. He had to talk them in to abandoning God's Word.

D. Conclusion: We have more to talk about but consider this thought as we close. In Matt 7:24-27 Jesus spoke about two houses that experienced the same storm or trial.

1. One withstood the storm, the other was destroyed. The house that survived heard and did God's Word. God's Word to us in the hard times is always: Count it all joy. What is God saying to you in your trial? Consider this an occasion to rejoice. His promise is: If you do you will be perfect and entire wanting nothing. James 1:4

2. No matter what we are facing there is always something to rejoice about and be thankful for:

a. God has saved us from our sins. He has made us His sons and daughters and is making us holy and righteous in every part of our being. We have a future and a hope in this life and the life to come. All will be made right. God will get us through until He gets us out.

b. If we will make a choice to rejoice, if we will acknowledge God no matter how we feel or what we see, we will not take the bait and fall into the trap the devil has set for us. We won't let God's Word be stolen from us. More next week.