

## BE YE THANKFUL

- A. Introduction: For a number of weeks we have been discussing the importance of learning to praise God continually, in the good times and in the bad. The Bible is very clear that we are to respond to life's hardships with praise to God. Ps 34:1; James 1:2-4
1. This isn't an emotional response to your situation. Rather it's a volitional act, a choice. You choose to praise or acknowledge God by talking about who He is and what He does. Hab 3:17-19
    - a. Praise is the appropriate response to God. It's always appropriate to praise Him for His goodness and His wonderful works. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
    - b. The root word of the Greek term frequently translated praise in the New Testament is AINEO. It means to tell a story or narrative. We praise God in the face of life's challenges by telling the story of His love or talking about His character and His works.
    - c. Developing the habit of continual praise to God takes effort. But it's worth the effort because praise not only glorifies God, it opens the door to His help and power in your situation. Ps 50:23
  2. Heb 13:15--Through Him therefore let us constantly and at all times offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that thankfully acknowledge and confess and glorify His name. (Amp)
    - a. These words were first written to Jewish believers familiar with the Temple system of sacrifices. Under the Law of Moses they offered a sacrifice known as a thank offering. Lev 7:12; 22:29
      1. Thank offerings were made when things were going well to help them remember God. These offerings were also made when troubles arose to help them keep their focus on God's presence with them and His willingness to help them.
      2. The original readers of Hebrews were facing increasing pressure to renounce Jesus as Messiah. The message they'd have heard from Heb 13:15 was: When you face trouble, praise and thank God. It will help you stay focused on His presence with you and His help toward you no matter what comes your way.
    - b. We've talked much about an incident recorded in II Chron 20 where King Jehoshaphat and his kingdom, Judah, faced an overwhelming attack from a much greater and more powerful force.
      1. They sought God and He said: I will do what you can't do. Therefore, the battle is mine, not yours (v15-17). They went into battle with praisers out ahead of the army. The enemy armies began to fight among themselves and Judah won without firing a shot, a solution and outcome they could not have imagined. Their victory is described as rejoicing over their enemies. v27
      2. Note what the praisers proclaimed as they went into battle: v21--When he (Jehoshaphat) had consulted with the people, he appointed singers to sing to the Lord and praise Him in their holy [priestly] garments, as they went out before the army, saying, Give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy and loving-kindness endure forever (Amp).
        - A. Judah led with thanksgiving or gratefulness. To thank someone is to express gratitude. To be grateful means to be deeply appreciative of kindness or benefits received.
        - B. In every situation there is always something to thank God for—the good He has done, the good He is doing, and the good He will do.
  3. In this lesson we're going to conclude our discussion of praising God continually by looking at the importance of being thankful to God.
- B. We've talked much about the Apostle Paul. Let's consider some things he wrote about thanking God.
1. Paul not only wrote to the Hebrew Christians, he wrote to the Thessalonians, another group of believers experiencing persecution because of their faith. He told them: rejoice, pray, thank. I Thess 5:16-18
    - a. v16--Rejoice always. We've said much about this word "rejoice". It does not refer to an emotion, but rather to a state of mind. Be "cheer" full, or cheer (encourage) yourself with the reasons you have hope. Rom 12:12; II Cor 6:10; James 1:2
    - b. v17--Pray without ceasing: Be unceasing in prayer—praying perseveringly (Amp). We think of

prayer as asking for things. However, prayer is fellowshiping with God (lessons for another day). Asking for something is one way to prayer. Thanksgiving and praise (rejoicing) is another way to pray. What the praisers who went out ahead of the army in II Chronicles did was prayer.

- c. v18--Thank [God] in everything--no matter what the circumstances may be, be thankful and give thanks; for this is the will of God for you [who are] in Christ Jesus (Amp). It is God's will for us that we thank Him in every situation.
  2. We know that Paul practiced what he preached. He praised, prayed and thanked God when he was jailed in the city of Philippi and was gloriously delivered by God's power. Acts 16:16-34
    - a. In his letter to the Philippians written about ten years later while he was jailed in Rome, Paul made it clear that he knew that praise and thanksgiving are part of effective prayer.
      1. Remember, if Paul didn't do what he instructed others to do in his writings, then he was a hypocrite. God would not have used a hypocrite to write two-thirds of the New Testament.
      2. Phil 4:4-6--He exhorted Christians to rejoice (same word we referred to early) always and to make requests of God with thanksgiving. According to Paul and the Holy Spirit we thank God when we pray, before we see results. The idea in the Greek is with grateful language.
    - b. Notice also that this is Paul's remedy for worry (or being careful). The word careful is the same word Jesus used in Matt 6:25 when He exhorted believers not to worry. The root Greek word means to draw in different directions. It has the idea of distraction.
    - c. When circumstances arise that generate fear and worry, Paul said: Put your focus on God through praise and thanksgiving. That's what Jesus said: Don't take thoughts about where provision will come from. Put your focus on your Heavenly Father who takes care of own. Matt 6:26-34
  3. Paul also wrote these words when he was in prison in Rome: Be ye thankful. Note that he said "be" thankful as opposed to feel thankful.
    - a. Col 3:15--And practice being thankful (Williams); Learn, too, to be grateful (Knox); And be thankful--appreciative, giving praise to God always (Amp).
    - b. There's always something to be thankful for in every situation--the good God has done, the good He is doing, and the good He will do. If you develop and live with an attitude of gratitude it makes it much easier to praise the Lord no matter how you feel or what you see.
- C. Perhaps you've heard people say or you've had this thought yourself: God's done nothing for me. I have nothing to be thankful for. My life is a disaster, a complete mess. Consider several thoughts.
1. Our flesh isn't naturally grateful. We're self-focused and dominated by how we feel in the moment.
    - a. That's why we have to teach children to be appreciative and grateful. That's why we have to help them learn to control their emotions and stop throwing tantrums. This tendency doesn't just "go away". When we see "bad" and "feel bad" the last thing we want to do is express gratitude.
    - b. We must choose to be grateful, choose to express thanksgiving to God. I Thess 5:18--Make it a habit to thank God. (Williams)
  2. To be grateful in the middle of a difficult circumstance, you have to know how to look back at God's past help and forward to His future help to properly assess your situation in the present moment.
    - a. We must see the big picture. Your worst problem is not your immediate crisis. Your greatest problem is that you are guilty of sin before a holy God and there is nothing you can do about it.
      1. But God has remedied your worst problem. He has redeemed you by paying the price for your sin so it can be washed away and you can receive eternal life.
      2. According to the Bible we're supposed to be thanking God that we are redeemed. Are you in the habit of thanking God for what He has already done for you through His death, burial and resurrection? Ps 107:1,2--Thank the Lord because he is good. His love continues forever. That is what those whom the Lord has saved should say (NCV).
    - b. We must also be able to put this life and its troubles in their proper perspective. There is more to life than just this life. We have a future and a hope in the life to come.

1. Paul was lifted up in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances because he realized that in comparison to eternity, the hardships of life aren't that big. II Cor 4:17; Rom 8:18
2. Do you know that the best is yet to come, first in Heaven and then on the new earth? How often do you thank God for what awaits you because you are redeemed?
3. If you don't have a habit of thanking God for what He's already done and for what's ahead it's hard to thank Him in the midst of present hardship. Consider Israel on the way to Canaan.
  - a. God supernaturally delivered them from slavery in Egypt. But once they were through the Red Sea life didn't go exactly as they thought. They had to journey through a mountainous desert region and face all the challenges presented by such an environment.
    1. By this point in time Israel had seen God's mighty power demonstrated in persuading Pharaoh to release them, the Red Sea parted, a pillar of fire and cloud to protect and guide them. God had also promised: I'll get you out of Egypt and bring you into Canaan. He'd done half of it. There was no reason to think He wouldn't do the rest.
    2. Yet when they encountered their first obstacle three days out of Egypt (undrinkable water) they responded by murmuring (Ex 15:23,24). To murmur or complain means to mutter in discontent. It is the opposite of gratefulness or thanksgiving.
    - b. This was a real, potentially deadly crisis. But they could have made their request known to God with thanksgiving. And they could have encouraged themselves by thanking Him for delivering them from Egyptian slavery and praising Him for the wonderful land ahead.
      1. It would have bolstered their confidence that He would help them now, in the present crisis. Instead they're going to murmur and complain all the way to Canaan. There's not one example of them thanking and praising God after their post-Red Sea celebration. Ex 15:1-21
      2. In Rom 1:18-32 Paul described a downward spiral of human behavior that leads to rejection of God and debasement of humanity in increasingly destructive acts (lessons for another day).
        - A. But the process begins with not glorifying and thanking God. v21--Yet they did not offer him as God either praise or thanksgiving (20<sup>th</sup> Cent).
        - B. If Israel had developed a habit of gratefulness as they journeyed to Canaan it would have kept them from falling into sin in the other areas recorded in scripture. I Cor 10:6-11
    - c. What happened to Israel really happened. But it is called redemption, and it pictures what God has done for us (Ex 6:6;15:13). We, like them, have plenty to be thankful for no matter what we face.
      1. We can thank God that He has delivered us from the kingdom of darkness and made us His sons and daughters through faith. We can thank Him that we have a beautiful home awaiting us, first in Heaven and then on the earth made new.
      2. We have the historical example of God's care of His redeemed people Israel as they faced the challenges of life in a sin cursed wilderness. They had food, water, protection and guidance.
        - A. They failed to thank and praise God for His provision even after they saw it. It ultimately cost them the Promised Land because they built a habit of unbelief in themselves.
        - B. Their example is recorded so that we won't make the same mistakes. It shows the value of learning to rejoice and thank God for redeeming us, thanking Him for our future, and thanking Him that He is with us and for us and will get us through until He gets us out.
4. There is always something to thank God for in every situation: The good He has done, is doing and will do. Paul wrote of giving thanks for all things. Eph 5:20
  - a. We need to first clear up misunderstanding of this verse. Some say it means to thank God for the good and the bad in your life because everything comes from God either directly or indirectly.
    1. That is incorrect. Bad does not come God. God is good and good means good. Jesus, who is God and shows us God, who said He only did what He saw His Father do (John 14:9; 5:19; etc.) never did or allowed bad to anyone during His earth ministry. (lessons for another day)
    2. We live in a sin cursed earth, a world damage by sin and bad stuff happens. But God is able to take the bad and use it to bring good. Rom 8:28

A. We can be thankful before we see because scripture give example after example of how God works with the realities of life in a sin damaged world.

B. John 6:11--Jesus gave thanks for five loaves and two fish in the face of five thousand men plus women and children because He knew “not enough” could become “more than enough” in the hands of His Father.

b. The Old Testament was written to give us reasons to hope even in life’s biggest challenges (Rom 15:4). It shows us how God works behind the scenes to bring deliverance to His people.

1. We can see that Israel could have been thankful at the Red Sea, not for the obstacle it presented but for what God was going to do -- part it, deliver them and destroy their enemy.

2. We can see that the sword brought on to the field to kill David became the instrument used to cut off Goliath’s head. We can see that the three armies that came against Jehoshaphat and Judah would become confused and kill each other, a solution they could not have imagined.

c. These incidents (and many others) were recorded to inspire us to thank and praise God in the present moment because, even if we can’t see a way out, He can. He can and turn bad into good.

D. Conclusion: When we encounter troubles what we see is real. So is the fear and pain we experience. To praise God seems unnatural. If we develop a habit of gratefulness it is easier to thank and praise God for His help and provision before we see it.

1. When you’re looking at an impossible situation it can seem hopeless. But there is no such thing as a hopeless situation for those who know the God of hope. Nothing is bigger than God. All loss is temporary. There is recompense either in this life or the life to come. Rom 15:13

a. If you are used to thanking God that He has saved you from sin and provided a future and a hope for you in the life to come, if that has become part of your consciousness, it will help you praise Him in the present moment.

b. It helps you keep your mind focused on reality as it truly is: God is with you and for you and wants to work in your situation to bring maximum good and maximum glory out of it.

c. Thanksgiving and praise keep the reasons we have hope before us. It helps you keep your focus on God’s power and promise of provision in your circumstance. Hope will sustain you through the darkest hours of life.

2. In this series we’ve looked at numerous examples of people who thanked and praised God in the face of extremely difficult challenges and were both lifted up above in the midst and delivered out of trials.

a. Let’s learn from their examples and become grateful people who continually thank and praise God no matter what we see or how we feel.

b. Ps 50:32--Whoso offers praise glorifies me and he prepares the way so that I may show him my salvation. (NIV)