

## CONTROL YOURSELF WITH PRAISE

- A. Introduction: Since the beginning of the year we have been emphasizing the fact that the New Testament was written by eyewitnesses of Jesus (or close associates of eyewitnesses). These men did not write a religious book. These men walked and talked with Jesus and they wrote to tell the world what they saw.
1. For several weeks we have been considering some things one of the New Testament authors—the apostle Paul—wrote. Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles. He became a believer when the resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to him about three years after the resurrection. Acts 9:1-6
    - a. Jesus interrupted Paul (originally called Saul) as he traveled to Damascus, Syria to arrest Christians. Paul had been a zealous persecutor of Christians, but based on what he saw and heard that day on the road to Damascus, he became an ardent follower of Jesus.
      1. Paul immediately “began preaching Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is indeed the Son of God!’...Saul’s preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn’t refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah” (Acts 9:20-22, NLT).
      2. This is a powerful argument for the reality of the resurrection. Paul was a hostile witness who, based on what he witnessed, became a believer in the very thing he previously fought against.
    - b. Jesus appeared to Paul a number of times over the years and personally instructed him (Acts 26:16; Gal 1:11-12). We have much information about what Paul preached and taught because he wrote 14 of the 21 epistles found in the New Testament. The epistles are letters written to believers in Jesus to explain what Christians believe and how we’re supposed to live and behave in this world.
      2. In his epistles Paul made a number of references to living life focused on Jesus. He urged believers to live looking unto Jesus (Heb 12:2; II Cor 4:18; Col 3:2; etc.). What does that mean? How do we do it?
        - a. To be told to live our lives focused on Jesus seems a little vague. We all have responsibilities we must attend to, as well as daily tasks we must focus on and complete. If we watch a movie or participate in an activity not directly related to Jesus are we failing to keep our attention on Him?
          - b. How do we focus on Jesus and still live in the real world? How do we focus on someone we can’t see or feel? Last week we began to address some of these issues and have more to say tonight.
      3. To focus and keep your attention on Jesus, you must first get to know Him as He truly is by reading the eyewitness testimony regularly and systematically. Then you must learn to acknowledge God.
        - a. To read regularly and systematically means to read each New Testament book and epistle from start to finish, over and over. Don’t worry about what you don’t understand. Just keep reading. Understanding comes with familiarity and familiarity comes with regular, repeated reading.
        - b. To acknowledge God means to praise Him. Praise, at its most basic level, has nothing to do with music. To praise simply means to express approval or commend.
          1. You praise or acknowledge God by talking about Who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. Ps 107:8, 15, 21, 31
          2. Praise to God is not based on how you feel or the circumstances in your life. We praise God because it is the right thing to do. It’s always appropriate to praise or acknowledge the Lord for who He is and for what He has done, is doing, and will do.
      - c. There’s more to reality than what you see and feel in the moment. God is with you and for you—God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble (Ps 46:1, NLT).
        1. When you acknowledge God it puts your focus back on the way things really are: Nothing can come against you that is bigger than God and He will get you through until He gets you out.
        2. When you acknowledge someone you cannot see (Almighty God) for something you don’t yet see or feel (His help and provision) you’re expressing faith or trust in Him. II Cor 5:7

B. Paul’s encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus completely transformed Paul’s life. Paul recognized

that Jesus was and is the Messiah, promised and predicted in the Old Testament, the portion of the Bible that was completed in Paul's day (Genesis to Malachi). At that time it was known as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings (or Psalms), or simply as the Law and the Prophets.

1. As a Pharisee, Paul was thoroughly schooled in these writings. Paul's epistles are laced with Old Testament references and quotes. In fact, he used these Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the Messiah.
  - a. Prior to his conversion, Paul's view of reality was shaped by the Old Testament writings. Once Paul met Jesus, the Lord gave him additional information and greater insight into the Old Testament Scriptures and further affected his view of reality. John 5:39; Luke 24:44-48; Col 1:27; etc.
  - b. The Old Testament is primarily the history of the Jewish nation, the people group through whom Jesus came into this world. These writings show us how God worked in the lives of real people as He worked out His plan to deliver mankind from the penalty and power of sin through Jesus.
  - c. These historical records show how people got real help from God in really difficult circumstances. Paul later wrote that: Such things were written long ago to teach us. They give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises (Rom 15:4, NLT).
2. These Old Testament accounts reveal how acknowledging God (praising God) helped real people keep their focus on the Lord in the midst of fearsome circumstances. We looked at some examples last week.
  - a. II Chron 20 recounts how in 896 BC King Jehoshaphat of Judah (southern Israel) faced a formidable enemy army, with no seeming solution. Jehoshaphat directed his people to acknowledge God.
    1. They went into battle praising the Lord "saying. Give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy and loving kindness endures forever" (II Chron 20:21, Amp).
    2. In that circumstance, human nature would have been to talk about what they could see (an overwhelming enemy) and how they felt (afraid). But praise (acknowledging God) helped them keep their focus on the Lord—the source of their salvation.
  - b. David, king over all of Israel from 1004 to 972 BC, was for many years prior to taking the throne, relentlessly pursued by Israel's first king, Saul, who was intent on killing David.
    1. David wrote many psalms in this period that give insight into how he dealt with the physical, mental, and emotional challenges he faced. In one of his psalms David wrote: What time I am afraid, I will trust in you—I will praise your word. Ps 56:3-4
    2. David did not deny his circumstances or pretend he wasn't afraid. Instead, he acknowledged God which helped him quell those feelings and keep his attention on the Lord.
  - c. Two Hebrew words for praise are used in the above incidents. They give us insight into what it means to praise and acknowledge God in the face of fearful and painful circumstances.
    1. One is *halal* which means to shine or make a show, to boast or shout. The other is *yadah* which means the act of acknowledging what is right about God in praise and thanksgiving.
    2. The word hallelujah comes from the word *halal*. Hallelujah is a command to praise YAH (the Lord). It's always appropriate to praise the Lord. Alleluia is a Greek form of this word.
3. Ps 34:1-3—This is another of David's "on the run" psalms. Keep in mind that he was a real person in a very difficult circumstance. He would have had the same kinds of emotions and thoughts as us in that situation. Yet he wrote about praising the Lord continually and boasting and magnifying God.
  - a. The word translated praise is derived from the word *halal* and expresses genuine appreciation for the actions and character of its object. Boast is the word *halal* in the Hebrew.
    1. In the face of challenges and all the related thoughts and emotions, David chose to acknowledge by praising God, by boasting about Him.
    2. David tells us how he did this—he magnified God. When you magnify something, the size of the actual object doesn't change. You simply make it bigger in your eyes. When you praise God (talk about how big He is, how good He is, how faithful He is) He gets bigger in your sight.
  - b. Most of us have a tendency to magnify the problem and talk about how big and impossible it is.

1. Yes, but don't we need to talk about the problem so we can find a solution? That's often true, but what about situations where there is no solution or you can't change it? That's when we need to magnify God. No problem is too big and no situation is impossible for Him.
  2. Consider this: When you're thinking about your situation is it producing any positive steps toward solutions? Are you focused on things you can't fix or change? Is your mind filled with thoughts about things you can't possibly know yet (what may or may not happen)? None of that is glorifying to God and much of it is counterproductive and harmful to you.
    - c. Praise (acknowledging God) helps you put your attention on the way things really are—God with you and for you, an ever present help. To pay attention means to fix one's mind on something.
      1. You bring your mind under control by filling it with praise: Thank you Lord. I praise you Lord. This situation isn't bigger than you! You will make a way where there is no way.
      2. You get control of your mind with your mouth. You can't speak one thing and think another. When you speak out praise to God it focuses your thoughts and attention on Him and brings peace to your mind and heart. Isa 26:3
  4. In these and other incidents recorded in the Old Testament, people received help in their circumstances in various forms as they praised the Lord—strength, comfort, direction, deliverance, etc.
    - a. A psalm written by a man named Asaph gives us insight into why praise helps us. Asaph was a musician from the tribe of Levi appointed by King David to preside over sacred choir services.
      1. He wrote Ps 50:23—Whoso offers praise glorifies me (KJV), and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God (NIV). The Hebrew word (*towdah*) means praise and thanksgiving. It was used to describe “worship through songs of thanksgiving and praise that extol (glorify) the mighty wonders of the Lord” (Strong).
      2. There's power in praise. Praise is the voice of faith, and God works in our lives by His grace through our faith. We prepare the way for Him to help us.
    - b. David expressed this idea in one of his psalms. He wrote that: Out of the mouth of babes and unweaned infants You have established strength because of Your foes, that you might silence the enemy and the avenger (Ps 8:2, Amp).
      1. There is a strength that has the power to “shut Satan's mouth” (Ps 8:2, TPT). Jesus defined this strength as praise to God.
      2. Matt 21:14-16—Not long before Jesus was crucified He healed blind and lame people at the Temple in Jerusalem. When the chief priests and scribes heard little children crying “Hosanna to the Son of God” in response to Jesus and His actions, they were very upset.
        - A. Hosanna comes from two Hebrew words, save (deliver, help, defend) and now. It was an exclamation of praise: Praise God for the Son of David (the Messiah) (Matt 21:15, NLT).
        - B. Jesus defined this strength as praise (v16). The Greek word means a story or narration and came to denote praise to God. When you praise you tell who He is and what He's done.
- C. From these Old Testament accounts Paul learned the power of acknowledging God in the midst of troubles. Last week we referred to the time that Paul and his ministry partner Silas were jailed for casting the devil out of a slave girl. They praised and acknowledged God and saw a mighty deliverance. Acts 16:16-26
1. II Cor 6:10—When writing about his many troubles Paul talked about being sorrowful and yet always rejoicing. The Greek word translated rejoice (*chairō*) means to be “cheer”ful, not “feel” cheerful.
    - a. To cheer means to give hope, urge on, shout with joy, approval and enthusiasm; to rejoice. To rejoice means to cheer or encourage yourself.
    - b. You don't deny what you see and feel or pretend that you're not in a difficult circumstance. You can cry and rejoice at the same time. When you rejoice you talk about your situation in terms of how big God is, how good He is, and what He says about things.

2. Paul was not the only one of Jesus' eyewitness to write about rejoicing in tribulation. James, Jesus' half brother, also urged believers to be "cheer" ful (*chariro*) in the face of trouble.
    - a. Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin when His human nature was conceived in her womb (when the Word was made flesh, John 1:14). Mary and Joseph had no marital relations until after Jesus was born. They subsequently had children together—half brothers and sisters of Jesus. Jesus' brothers and sisters (including James) did not believe in Him. James became a believer when he saw Jesus after the resurrection. Matt 13:55-56; Mark 3:21; John 7:5; I Cor 15:7
    - b. James 1:2-3—James admonished believers to count it all joy when they fall into various temptations or trials. Let's first clear up some common misunderstandings of this passage.
      1. God does not send or allow trials and troubles to test us or make us patient. Trials are part of life in a fallen, sin damaged world. For a fuller discussion of this point read my book: *God Is Good And Good Means God*.
        - A. Trials do test our faith in the sense that we must decide whether or not we are going to trust God and His goodness no matter what we see and feel.
        - B. Trials don't make us patient. If they did, we'd all be patient because everyone has trials—yet not everyone is patient. Patience is translated from a Greek word that means hopeful endurance. Trials give us an opportunity to exercise or demonstrate endurance.
          1. v3—For when your faith is tested it stirs up in you the power of endurance (TPT).
          2. v3—Be assured and understand that the trial and proving of your faith bring out endurance and steadfastness and patience (Amp).
      2. Count is from a Greek word that means to deem or consider. Joy is a noun that comes from the verb (*chairo*), to be "cheer" ful. Count it all joy means to consider this trial as an occasion to respond with joy.
        - A. James 1:2—Consider it wholly joyful, my brethren, whenever you are enveloped in or encounter trials of any sort, or fall into various temptations (Amp).
        - B. As you learn to acknowledge and praise God, as you learn to cheer yourself with the truth, you will find that you have what you need to deal with whatever challenges you are facing.
          1. James 1:4—And then as your endurance grows even stronger, it will release perfection into every part of your being until there is nothing missing and nothing lacking (TPT).
          2. James 1:4—But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character, men of integrity with no weak spots (J.B. Phillips).
  3. Based on what they learned from Jesus and the Old Testament accounts, Jesus' eyewitnesses knew the importance of regarding their troubles as an occasion to rejoice or cheer themselves. And they urged first century Christians to rejoice in hope and be patient in tribulation. Rom 12:12
- D. Conclusion: We have more to say next week, but consider these thoughts as we close. Acknowledging God (praising Him) helps you endure or persevere because it keeps you focused on the only source of help and peace in this world: Almighty God with us and for us.
1. This isn't automatic for any of us. In the midst of your trouble and the emotions and thoughts generated by what you're dealing with, you must choose to acknowledge God with your mouth.
  2. When you learn to rejoice it helps you get control of your mind and emotions. And it helps you keep your focus and attention on the way things are according to God. He is with you and for you and He will get you through until He gets you out! When you live with this awareness it brings peace and hope to your mind. Much more next week!!