

CHOOSE TO PRAISE GOD

- A. Introduction: Recently we've been talking about the importance of learning to keep our attention focused on Jesus. What does this mean and how do we do it? We have more to say in this lesson.
1. Paul the apostle was a master at keeping his focus on Jesus. As a result, he experienced a tremendous amount of victory in his life. Victory for Paul did not mean no problems. It meant that he had peace of mind, hope, and joy in the midst of his hardships. Rom 8:35-39
 - a. Paul faced many difficulties in his life. However, he testified that they did not weigh him down because he kept his attention on unseen realities rather than on what he could see. II Cor 4:17-18
 - b. Paul lived victoriously in the midst of troubles because he knew that there is more to reality than what he could see in the moment. These unseen realities gave him hope, joy, and peace of mind.
 - c. There are two kinds of unseen things—things we can't see because they're invisible (we can't perceive them with physical senses) and things we can't see because they are future (still to come).
 1. There is an unseen realm or dimension. Almighty God, Who is invisible, presides over an unseen kingdom of power and provision. This realm can and does affect the material realm.
 2. There is more to life than just this life. The greater and better part of life is after this life, first Heaven and then on this earth once it is renewed and restored at the return of Jesus. Rev 21-22
 2. The Bible reveals (tells us about) unseen realities. Through this information, the Bible changes your perspective or your view of reality which then changes your attitudes and the way you deal with life.
 - a. You become persuaded that God is with you and for you and that nothing can come against you that is bigger than Him. You live with the awareness that everything you see is temporary and subject to change by His power either in this life or the life to come. You're certain that He will get you through until He gets you out. This perspective gives you hope and peace of mind.
 - b. The problem is that when we hit hard times, our emotions and thoughts get stimulated by what we see and experience in our circumstances. What we see and feel, along with our thoughts, can make it easy to forget all these wonderful truths about God, His power and provision, and our future.
 1. To keep your focus on unseen realities in the midst of trouble, you must learn to acknowledge or praise God. Praise in its most basic form means to commend or express approval, like when we tell someone "job well done". It doesn't involve music and can be done anytime anywhere.
 2. In the face of turmoil and emotional and mental stress, you must choose to acknowledge God by proclaiming who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. When you praise or acknowledge God it puts your attention back on Him.
 - c. Praise doesn't come naturally to fallen human flesh. You must choose to acknowledge God or put your focus back on Him through proclaiming who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
 1. Heb 12:1-2—Paul instructed Christians to live their lives looking unto Jesus. Looking unto is translated from two Greek words, away and to stare at. It has the idea of looking away from one thing and attentively considering another.
 2. Sight, emotions, and thoughts distract us from the way things really are according to God. Acknowledging God helps us put our attention back on the way things really are—God is with us and for us and this circumstance isn't bigger than Him.
 3. Not only does praise put our attention back on God, there is power in praise. Praise stops the enemy, stills the avenger, and prepares the way for God to show you His salvation. Ps 8:2; Matt 21:16; Ps 50:23
 - a. Praise is the voice of faith or trust. When you acknowledge some you can't see (Almighty God) for something you don't yet see (His help and provision), that's an expression of faith or trust. God works in our lives by His grace through our faith.
 - b. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord because of who He is and what He does no matter how you feel or what you are dealing with. You were created to glorify God through praise. Eph 1:12

1. Ps 107:8, 15, 21, 31 exhorts men and women to praise God for His goodness (Who He is) and His wonderful works (what He does). The psalm opens with a statement about God—He is good, His mercy (loving kindness) lasts forever, and He redeems (delivers) His people from their enemies. The psalm then exhorts the redeemed to speak this out (v1-2).
2. The Hebrew word used for praise in Ps 107 is *yadah*. It means the act of acknowledging what is right about God in praise and thanksgiving. We spend way too much time talking about what is wrong in our circumstances rather than acknowledging who God is and what He does.

B. In the last two lessons we noted that Paul responded to life's hardships by rejoicing or acknowledging God. In the context of his many trials, he talked about being sorrowful yet always rejoicing. II Cor 6:10; Acts 16

1. The Greek word Paul used for rejoice (*chairo*) means to be "cheer"ful as opposed to feel cheerful. To cheer means to give hope, urge on, shout with approval and enthusiasm—to rejoice.
 - a. We don't have many specific examples of how Paul cheered or talked to himself. But we do know that, as a Pharisee, his world view was shaped by the Old Testament which is primarily the history of the Jews (the people group Jesus was born into).
 - b. Its writings contain many examples of people who acknowledged God in their hard times and received help from God—some in the form of deliverance, others in the form of peace of mind and hope in the midst of their difficulties.
 1. Paul would have been familiar with psalms that Israel's king David wrote when he was being relentlessly pursued by Saul, Israel's first king. Saul was intent on killing David, who literally spent years on the run for his life, cut off from home, friends and family.
 2. We've referred to several of these "on the run psalms" where David, despite his emotions and circumstances, chose to acknowledge God and encourage himself with unseen realities.
 - A. David wrote: What time I am afraid I will trust in you. I will praise (or boast in) your Word (Ps 56:3-4). Your praise shall be in my mouth continually (Ps 34:1-3).
 - B. David didn't deny his circumstances or pretend he wasn't afraid. Instead, he acknowledged God which helped him deal with his emotions and put his focus back on the Lord and the way things really are.
 2. Ps 42 is a vivid example of how David encouraged or cheered himself. It was composed while he was in exile. In the psalm he laments being unable to worship the Lord at the Tabernacle. Then he begins to get control of his thoughts and emotions and put his focus on the Lord.
 - a. After admitting his emotional pain, David began to talk to himself: Why am I discouraged? Why so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God; I am deeply discouraged but I will remember your kindness (v5-6, NLT)
 - b. Note that he made a choice to rejoice—to cheer or encourage himself. In the original Hebrew language David's statement, my Savior (v5), reads: I will give thanks, for His presence is salvation—My present Salvation and my God (Spurrell).
 1. David understood that there was more to the situation than what he could see or feel. God, who is Invisible, was with him.
 2. David is the one who wrote: I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, you are there (Ps 139:7-8, NLT).
 - A. David knew that there is no place God is not. Wherever he went, God was with him and His presence is salvation because nothing could come against David bigger than God.
- B. Therefore, David said, I will remember you right here where I am, on Mount Hermon and Mount Mizar. I will choose to bring you and your past and present help to my mind.
- c. Last week we looked at Ps 34:1-3 last week. In the face of challenges and all the related thoughts and emotions, David chose to acknowledge God by praising and boasting about Him continually.

1. In v3 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 talk about how big, good, and faithful God is, He gets bigger in your sight and you feel better.
2. In Ps 34:7 David wrote that the Angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and delivers them. The Angel of the Lord is the Old Testament name for Jesus before He took on a human nature in the womb of Mary (Isa 63:9; Ex 13:21-22; Ex 14:19; Ex 23:20-23; I Cor 10:1-4; etc.). David knew that God, His Savior, was present with him to help and deliver him. (See previous lessons for more information about Preincarnate Jesus.)
3. Ps 63—David wrote this psalm while he was hiding from Saul in the Judean Wilderness, east of Jerusalem. It was and is “a parched and weary land where there is no water” (v1, NLT).
 - a. v6-7—I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. I think how much you have helped me; I sing for joy in the shadow of your protecting wings (NLT).
 - b. David is a real person in a difficult and dangerous circumstance. Yet he chose to acknowledge God He chose to think about God's past help and to rejoice.
 1. The Hebrew word translated meditate means to murmur or to ponder. Ponder means to consider carefully. Murmur implies continuous flow of words or sounds in a low, indistinct voice and can apply to utterances of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (*Webster's Dictionary*).
 2. In other words, David chose to utter praise to God out of his mouth. He can't be too loud or exuberant or he'll wake up the men who are with him or let the enemy know where he is.
 3. The word translated rejoice means to creak or emit a shrill, grating, or chirping sound. It can be translated shout. David was shouting on the inside of himself.
 - c. David referred to rejoicing in the shadow of God's wings (v7). This phrase appears in a number of his psalms. It's a reference to the fact that various kinds of chicks instinctively run to hide under their mother's protective wings when danger approaches.
 1. Ps 57 is another “on the run psalm” written when David was hiding from Saul in a cave. Note this verse—Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until this violent storm is past (v1, NLT).
 2. David understood that there was more to his situation than what he could see—unseen realities. Everywhere he looked with his eyes he saw cave walls. Yet David was able to look past it because he was persuaded that God was with him. He knew God with him was his salvation. And he stirred himself to rejoice. Ps 57:7-8
 - d. When we encounter life's hardships (potentially or actually) we can be overwhelmed by emotions as multitudes of thoughts fly through our mind.
 1. However, we are made in such a way that we can't say one thing and, at the same time, think a completely different thought in our mind. You can make your mind focus on God and unseen realities through your mouth—by speaking out who God is and what He has, is, and will do.
 2. David got control of his thoughts and emotions through his mouth. He uttered praise to God. His praise (acknowledgement of God) came out of his view of reality.
4. David, like Paul, got his view of reality from the Word of God—the Scriptures that were completed in his day. He meditated on it (pondered it) throughout the day. Ps 1:1-3
 - a. This doesn't mean that David constantly had Bible verses in his head. It means that he was equipped to assess his circumstances in terms of what God says.
 - b. All year long we've been talking about the importance of becoming a regular, systematic Bible reader, especially the New Testament (see earlier lessons for more details). This practice not only shapes your view of reality, it arms you with information that helps you deal with the mental and emotions challenges we all face. It gives you something to praise God for
 1. There is some dispute over who wrote Ps 119, but the style is one that David used in his psalms,

so many scholars ascribe it to him. The entire psalm is a proclamation of the value and reliability of the Word of God and His faithfulness to keep and fulfill His promises.

2. Note these statements: Lord, never forget the promises you've made to me, for they are my hope and confidence. In all of my affliction I find great comfort in your promise, for they have kept me alive...I refuse to budge from your precepts...I am encouraged everything I think about your truth (v49-52, TPT).
 - c. Most Bible scholars believe that David wrote Ps 94—In the multitude of my (anxious) thoughts within me, Your comforts cheer and delight my soul (v19, Amp).
 1. David couldn't see or feel God any more than you or I can. Yet, his view of reality was: God is with me and for me.
 2. By acknowledging God (talking to himself about who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do) David put his attention on that reality which brought him hope and peace of mind.
 - A. When we read David's psalms we find that it was sometimes a battle for him. He'd acknowledge God, get some relief, only to have the same emotions and thoughts come flooding back. But David kept at it.
 - B. We can and we must make our minds think about spiritual realities—who God is and what He has done for us. You can and should develop your ability to live with the awareness that God is with you and for you, and He will get you through until He gets you out.
 5. This isn't a technique—just say Praise the Lord and everything will be okay. This is about changing your view of reality through regular Bible reading until you are persuaded that God is with you and for you and nothing can come against you that is bigger than Him.
 - a. Then you respond to your situation out of that awareness. You choose to remember God and His faithfulness in the midst of the thoughts and emotions. You choose to harness your mouth and control your thoughts by proclaiming who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do.
 - b. When the emotions and thoughts roar, it can be helpful to have an SOS phrase, a Sight on Savior phrase that helps you put your attention back on God and His bigness—not as a technique, but as an acknowledgement of God and His bigness and goodness.
- C. Conclusion: We said earlier that Paul responded to life's hardships by rejoicing. He urged others to do the same. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Hebrews to a group of Jewish believers in Jesus who were experiencing increasing pressure and persecution from their fellow countrymen for their faith in Christ.
1. The entire epistle is an exhortation to stay faithful to Jesus no matter what happens. In this letter we find Paul's statement about running our race looking unto Jesus. Heb 12:1-2
 - a. Note one of Paul's final statements to them: Let us continually offer our sacrifice of praise to God by proclaiming the glory of his name (Heb 13:15, NLT).
 1. A sacrifice of praise was familiar to these people. As Jews who grew up under the Old Covenant and its systems of sacrifice they knew about a thank offering. Ps 107:21-22; Lev 7:12
 2. This offering was made to God with a public profession of His power, goodness, and mercy. The Hebrew word comes from *yadah* which means the act of acknowledging what is right about God in praise and thanksgiving. (This same word is used in Ps 50:23).
 - b. In good times this sacrifice helped them remember God's goodness and mercy. In times of danger, it helped them to be conscious of God's nearness and mercy. In other words, it helped them focus.
 2. It can be a sacrifice (or hard to praise God) when everything is going wrong and we feel terrible. But Paul knew the power of praise and thanksgiving in the hard times from his own experience and from the example of David. He knew that it's always appropriate to praise the Lord no matter what.
 3. When you acknowledge God, not only does it bring glory and honor to Him, it keeps your attention on God's goodness and bigness which lightens the load of life. We have more to talk about next week!!