

MESSAGES ON PRAISE

By Pastor Glenn Pease

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1. GOD IS WORTHY OF PRAISE Based on Psa. 145

Gilbert a Becket was a crusader who was captured and made a slave. The tyrant who enslaved him had a daughter who took pity on him, and that pity ripened into love. At the risk of her own life she helped him escape. He solemnly vowed to send for her when he got safely back to England. But when he got home he became so absorbed in other plans that he forgot the love of the one who had set him free. He owed his life to her, but she was far away, and what was near dominated his life.

She was still driven by her love for him, however, and so she sold all of her jewelry and came to England on her own. When Gilbert saw her and embraced her he repented of his neglect. In her presence he could no longer go the way of rejecting her love. He reversed his

plans to marry a wealthy English woman, and he took her to be his wife instead. It never would have happened in her absence. Only her presence rekindled his love and restored their relationship.

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder for somebody else," is a true saying, and it is true not only in the romantic realm, but in the religious realm as well. The sense of God's absence is the cause for all of the falls, failures, and follies of man. but the sense of God's presence is the cause for all of man's virtues, values, and victories. When man is aware of God's presence there is adoration, and all rivals are abhorred, but when man loses that awareness God is ignored and other values are explored.

When Israel lost its awareness of the presence of God, the presence of God was actually removed, and the temple was destroyed where they could meet with God. When God entered history in the presence of His Son, the leaders of Israel were not aware that this was the day of their visitation. God was present in their midst, but they rejected Him and crucified Him. Jesus prayed for their forgiveness, for He knew they were so unaware of the presence of God that they did not know it was God they were rejecting. Nothing is more lethal than unawareness. When man loses a sense of God's presence there is no evil they are incapable of committing. Every sin that a child of God has ever committed could have been prevented by the awareness of God's presence.

The Jews have recognized the importance of God's presence all through history, and so they have developed rituals that stress it. In The Bar mitzvah Treasury I read of how David Hirsch believed the Rabbi who taught him that when the congregation bowed in prayer the Shechinah itself-the very spirit and presence of God-appeared on the altar. If anyone looked up with one eye that eye would be blinded, and if one looked up with both eyes God would strike him dead. No

one could look on the form of God and live. Even Moses had to look at God's back. You can imagine the enormous tension in a young person as they prayed. He longed so to look up and see God, but he did not want to be blind, or to die. There was a terrific battle in his mind, but one day he lost control and lifted one eye to look, and to his shock there was no glory to blind him. The rest of the story is about his loss of faith and rebellion because of the loss of even the illusion of God's presence.

The Jews know they need the presence of God and they are willing to deceive in order to get it, but such a presence is a fiction. The Christian, however, who has the promise of Christ's presence can be so unaware of it that they also develop a pretend presence with form and rituals that becomes empty and equally powerless. The great need of any child of God is an authentic experience of the presence of Christ. An unknown poet wrote-

**Of all the prizes
That earth can give,
This is the best:
To find thee, Lord,
A living Presence near
An in thee rest!**

**Friends, fortune, fame,
Or what might come to me-
I count all loss
If I find not
Companionship
With thee!**

Jesus said He would send the Comforter to abide with us forever. The name means the one called beside, and so the idea of

companionship is very appropriate. The relationship of God and man is to be a companionship. We cannot be content with the saying, "God's in His heaven-all is right with the world." It is not all right. It is a world of fearful things, and we need to be able to say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. We need to hear the divine companion promise-

"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, and will still give thee aid.
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."

God the Father has promised His presence in our lives. God the Son has vowed to be ever with us, and the Holy Spirit makes our heart His temple, and so is ever near. Why then are we so often unaware of God's presence? Could it be that Harry Kemp is right in his poem called Blind?

The spring blew trumpets of color.
Her green sang in my brain.
I heard a blind man groping,
Tap-tap with his cane.
I pitied him his blindness,
But can I say I see?
Perhaps their walks close by a
Spirit that pities me.
A spirit that sees me tapping the
Five-sensed cane of time
Amid such unguessed glories
The I am worse than blind.

Jesus loved to make the blind to see, and our prayer needs to be, "Open my eyes Lord, I want to see Jesus." The key to this prayer

being answered is for us to develop a spirit of praise. David was a leader in developing the worship of Israel, and one of the primary characteristics of the worship he developed was praise. He made it the heart of worship, for praise opens the eyes to God's presence. Praise involves the intellect as we think of God's majesty, and the marvels of what He has made. Praise involves the emotions as we feel the grace and mercy of God in our lives, and as we are filled with joy. Praise involves the will as we choose to fulfill our purpose for being, which is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Praise gets our whole being involved in God's whole being.

The subject of praise is so vast that when you study it you feel like you are mining a mountain of gold with a spoon. There is no way to get the job done. But as marvelous as it is there are problems with it, and maybe some of you have the same hindrance to praise as C. S. Lewis did. In his *Reflections On The Psalms* Lewis wrote, "When I first began to draw near to belief in God and even for some time after it had been given to me, I found a stumbling block in the demand so clamorously made by all religious people that we should praise God: Still more in the suggestion that God Himself demanded it. We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtues, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratifies that demand. Thus a picture, at once ludicrous and horrible, both of God and of His worshippers, threatened to appear in my mind."

As Lewis gave deeper thought to the matter he discovered that men by nature praise all that they value and enjoy. They praise their leaders, their team, their nation, their friends, their favorite TV programs and their favorite anything or anyone. Life is full of praise, for that is how men communicate their values and their loves. Where there is no praise there is no love. Where is love there will be praise.

Songs of praise revolve around man's love for the opposite sex, and for God, for these are his two strongest loves. St. Augustine said many centuries ago, "Singing comes from joy, but if we observe more carefully, it comes from love, you want to sing about what you love."

Praise is a happy love song. It is a rejoicing because God is present and our relationship is one of love and enjoyment. Praise is itself a part of the enjoyment of God, and it is often the pathway by which we enter God's presence. Praise and presence are linked together as one. Lack of praise means loss of presence. Fellowship is the mutual enjoyment of one another's presence, which leads to praise. If we enjoy God's presence, we will praise Him, and if we praise Him, we are enjoying His presence. When C. S. Lewis came to see that our praise of God opens us up to His presence, he changed his mind. He saw that God does not crave our praise just for Himself. He wants to love and guide us, and He cannot do it if we are closed to His presence. By means of praise we open the door of our minds and hearts to God's presence.

When you praise someone on a human level you are focusing on them and their values at that moment and not just yourself. So when you praise God you are looking at Him, His glory, and His will. In prayer you are, more often than not, focusing on yourself and your needs, but in praise you are other centered, and this is the key to relationship. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. You do not get this done by the give me routine of the typical prayer. You do this by means of the giving of praise.

Praise is the one thing you can give God that He can appreciate. Usually we think there is nothing we can give to God, and so we approach God always as the Giver and seldom think of Him as a Receiver. What can we possibly give Him? We can give God the sacrifice of praise. In Heb. 13:15 we are told, "Through Jesus,

therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise." We do not offer lambs, bulls, or doves in sacrifice, for Jesus eliminated that need forever by His once for all sacrifice on the cross. But Jesus did not eliminate the sacrifice of praise. It was a vital part of worship in the Old Testament, and it is no less vital to the New Testament saint. Praise is something that the saints of all ages have in common. We need to ask, what can I put into the worship service that will please God? Worship is to be mutually beneficial to God and His people, and this will only happen through praise and adoration.

Praise is the fun and enjoyable side of our relationship to God. Praise is very simply our enjoying of God. We do not always enjoy God in prayer. Prayer can often be a burden. It can be a time of crying out to God and a pleading for needs to be met. Praise is an enjoyment of who God is and of what He has already done. I feel good when I walk into the home of my grandson Jason. He shouts at me, "Hi Grandpa Glenn." He comes running to give me a hug, and he says, "I love you."

His praise of me, and delight in my presence creates in me a delight to be in his presence, and to be a blessing to him. What is true on the human level is true in our relationship to God.

We are weak in our experience of enjoying God because we are weak in our experience of praise. In Psa. 119:164 we read, "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws." In marriage enrichment it is considered a great aid in your relationship to praise each other once a day. How enjoyable would seven times a day be? How enriched was the Psalmists enjoyment of God by seven periods of praise daily. Such a schedule of praise would guarantee a growing awareness of the presence of God. We ought not to expect to leap to this level of perfection and praise God seven times a day, but we need to learn to praise Him more.

**Praise His name, He's the same blessed Jesus!
Praise His name, He's the one I adore.
Praise Him, praise Him, praise Him,
Praise Him more and more and more.**

How do we develop the spirit of praise? We focus on that which makes God worthy of praise. In verse 3 we read, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise, His greatness no one can fathom." Then he goes on to speak of the splendor of his majesty, and of the awesomeness of his wonderful works. In our expanding universe we need to expand our conception of God. David in Psa. 8 said, "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" What David did not know is that the wonders he beheld were a mere fraction of God's work.

On a good night David could see between one and two thousand stars. Today with binoculars we can see up to one million stars. But even that is a small fraction of the 100 billion stars just in our own galaxy. Man has now developed ways to see 60 billion light years away and find multiplied millions of other galaxies, and all of this is the work of God's fingers. The universe is incomprehensible, and as far as man's imagination goes it is infinite. Unfortunately, as man's awareness of God's creation grows their awareness of God's nature remains primitive. Their small conception of God could not stand the strain, and so they lost their God in vastness of His creation. The creation became more wonderful and awesome than their God, and so they began to worship the creation rather than the Creator. It is important that we keep expanding in our understanding of God's nature so that He is always primary in our praise.

As wider skies broke out his view,

**God greatedened in his growing mind;
Each year he dreamed his God anew,
And left his older God behind.
He saw the boundless scheme dilate
In star and blossom, sky and clod,
And as the universe grew great,
He dreamed for it a greater God. Author unknown.**

The marvels of what we know of space is beyond belief, and there is so much we don't know. Size comparisons boggle the mind. If earth was one grain of wheat, the sun would be 4 bushels of wheat in comparison. And yet the sun is no great object in comparison to Betelgeuse, the bright red star in the shoulder of Orion. Our sun is 866,000 miles across, but Betelgeuse is 420 times greater in diameter. It would take an airplane flying at a rate of 600 miles per hour 70 years just to fly across it. This is just one of the billions of stars that God has made, and there is no end in sight of new stars. The universe speaks loud and clear that the God who made this masterpiece is in infinite.

If you are part of God's universe, you are a space traveler, for the whole thing is in rapid motion. The earth spins on its axis over a thousand miles per hour, so that every day we travel 25 thousand miles, and every year 9 million miles. You wonder why anyone every wants to get on a merry-go-round since we live on one all our lives. But it is so smooth we do not even perceive it. But we are slow pokes. The sun revolves at 4,000 miles per hour, and even it is far from a speed record, for Jupiter rotates at the dizzying rate of 28,000 miles per hour. We are all space travelers, for our entire galaxy is also revolving at a rate of about 5 billion miles per year. Dr. Clarence Benson sums up our yearly journey in God's playground of the universe:

"Each year we travel 9 million miles at one thousand miles an hour in the earth's diurnal motion; six hundred million miles at 18 miles a second in the planet's circuit of the Sun; four hundred million miles at 12 miles a second in the journey of the solar system through space; and finally, five billion miles at one hundred seventy five miles a second in the rotation of the galaxy. The teeming population of the earth are confined to minute portion of a vast universe that transcends our imagination but that prison cell is in reality a passenger coach that travels a little more than six billion miles each year."

Don't try to claim this on your tax form, but do claim it as evidence that God is a God of order and wonder worthy of praise. The Psalmist knew a mere fraction of what we know of God's wondrous works, but even what he knew was more than man can fathom. The greatest wonder of all is that this God of such infinite power and majesty loves us and desires us to enter his presence with praise.

There is no question of God's worthiness to receive praise. The question is, are we worthy to offer it? The Bible says that we are. That is one of the purposes of God in having a chosen people. They are chosen for praise. It was true of Israel in the Old Testament, and of the church in the New Testament. I Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light." Praise fulfills our purpose for being as a people, and our personal purpose in glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. Praise is the key to God's presence for us, and the key to God's pleasure in us.

Psa. 69:30-31 says, "I will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox,

more than a bull with its horns and hoofs." God's greatest pleasure is in the sacrifice of praise. Psa. 149 says that when God's people praise and take delight in Him, God takes delight in His people. God is not like the Sun. The Sun throws its rays on the earth and gives this blessing to us. There is nothing we can do to benefit the Sun in return. The Sun would be indifferent to us if we ever thought of something we might do. God, on the other hand, is enriched by how we respond to His gifts, His grace, and to His being.

God is ever worthy of our praise, and when we grant Him this gift that we can freely give, we gain the pleasure of His presence, and He gains the pleasure of love fulfilled. God is love and love has no greater pleasure than its expression being met with a loving response. The joy of eternity will be a mutual joy of God and man. We tend to think of what it will be for us, but forget how wonderful heaven will be for God with its endless praise from those whom He has saved by His love. In Rev. 4:11 this is the song that is sung before the throne: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

In Rev. 5:12 this is the song to Jesus: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise." Tens of thousand of poets have already begun in time to try and utter the songs of eternity, and that is what praise is all about. Someone wrote,

**"From the highest throne of glory
To the cross of deepest woe,
Thou didst come to ransom sinners,
Flow, my praise, forever flow."**

If God and our Savior are worthy of being praise for all eternity,

is it not logical that they are worthy of being praised in time? Will you join me in practicing the presence of God by practicing praise, and by joining in the conscious effort to know God better so that we see even more clearly that He is indeed worthy of praise.

2. THE POWER OF PRAISE Based on Psalm 149:1-9

Sometimes we take the wisest man in history too seriously. Solomon said there is nothing new under the sun, and those who take this as the last word can become pessimistic. What is the point of being an explorer if there are no new continents to be discovered. The poles have both been reached, and all the highest mountains have been climbed. There is nothing new to do, and so we are born to late. Such is the thinking of one who takes Solomon too seriously.

The fact is, the Bible is filled with new things, and one of the most common references is to the new songs we can sing to praise God. Not only does our text say, "Sing unto the Lord a new song," but this theme is repeated over and over so that it becomes a major duty of believers to be ever involved with the new.

Psa. 33:3-Sing unto Him a new song.

40:3-He hath put a new song in my mouth.

96:1-O sing unto the Lord a new song.

98:1-O sing unto the Lord a new song.

144:9-I will sing a new song unto Thee O God.

Isa. 42:10- Sing unto the Lord a new song.

Solomon did not realize that the best was yet to be under the new covenant where we would praise our Redeemer forever with new

songs. In Rev. 5:9 and 14:3, we hear new songs being sung in heaven in praise of Jesus. The fact is, there have been more songs sung in praise of Jesus than any other person in history, and for all eternity song writers will be busy coming up with new ones, for our praise of Him will never cease.

The message of the Bible is clear: Do not let your praise grow stale by singing the same songs over and over until they lose their freshness, and no longer move you to true adoration. I have sung hymns with my mind elsewhere because they were so familiar that I did not have to think. They were mere memorized rituals that I could go through with no real praise to God because my mind was not on God. A new song forces you to pay attention to what you are singing, and this engages your mind. You can't be day dreaming when singing a new song, and, therefore, you are more likely to truly praise.

The implication of the persistent call to sing new songs is that by nature we get into ruts, and even as God's people we grow stale in our worship. We need constant renewal, or we sink into dead orthodoxy where we have all the truth, but it makes no difference in our lives because it has lost its power to motivate us. If we let this happen, it is our own fault, because we are urged to never cease singing new songs to the Lord, and thus, keeping our love for Him fresh and alive.

What we do not realize is that praise is one of the key weapons for spiritual warfare. You will notice that this Psalm links praise and the sword. This sounds strange and shocking to us. Worship and warfare seem worlds apart in our minds, and it makes a discord in our minds to put them together as does verse 6: "May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands." The reason it does not fit our sense of harmony is because the subject has been neglected. Warren Wiersbe, one of the contemporary leaders in the study of worship, wrote in Moody Monthly, "I have

read books and sermons on the subject of worship, and I have yet to find a major work that says anything about worship as spiritual warfare."

We sing Onward Christian Soldiers, and Fight The Good Fight, but we do not take the issue of spiritual warfare very seriously. The result is we let our weapons be neglected, and they get rusty and ineffective for the battle. Israel did the same thing on the physical level. When she ceased to praise God she fell before the armies of her enemies. When she praised God she was victorious. One of the great examples is in II Chron. 20. A vast army of Moabites and Ammonites came against Israel. When king Jehoshaphat was told of it he went to prayer, and in verse 12 we read, "O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you."

God promised to be with them and so in verse 19 we read that the Levites, "Stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with very loud voice." As they marched to war, verse 21 says that Jehoshaphat, "Appointed men to sing to the Lord and to praise Him for the splendor of His holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: Give thanks to the Lord, for His love endures forever." As they marched into battle singing, the Lord gave them the victory over this far superior enemy. It was such a total victory they called the place the Valley Of Beracah, which means the valley of praise. They went there to praise God, then went back to the temple in Jerusalem to praise Him more with harp and lutes and trumpets. From then on Jehoshaphat had peace on all sides.

What was the secret weapon that gave them victory over a superior foe? It was praise. This made them superior, for praise is a weapon far more powerful than the weapons of warfare made by men. Praise puts God on your side, because you are on God's side. I

suspect that you could study the wars of history and discover that the side which most often won was the side with the greater number of praisers of God. When Israel lost a battle it was because they had ceased to praise God.

Since physical warfare is not a regular part of our lives as it was with God's Old Testament people, we need to apply this to the warfare of the spirit. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers and forces of darkness. In the whole armor of God, that Paul urges us to put on, only one is for an aggressive attack on evil, and that is the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God. It is by the Word that we take the offensive, and a large part of that sword is praise. By praise we can fight our way out of battles with evil, and by praise we can push back the forces of evil, and overcome the territory they hold.

Why should we bother to teach children Christian songs at a early age? It is because the Bible tells us it is a child's first weapon against evil. Psa. 8:2 says, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger." A little child singing puts a muzzle on the skeptic and the critic, and forces them into silence.

**Satan trembles when he hears
The songs of children strike his ears.**

The power of music kept the demons out of king Saul, who was otherwise under their control.

Psa. 52 is all about the two kinds of praises: Those who praise themselves and boast of their evil. They end in everlasting ruin. The others are the praises of God. They will go on flourishing in the house of God praising Him forever. Praise is the weapon that overcomes all

the forces that pull us away from God; especially pride. The praises of God conquer pride and avoid the fall it leads too. Praise is our weapon of victory. Let it get rusty and you are bound to be wounded by one of the many foes of the Christian life.

By praise we bind the enemy. In verse 8 of our text it speaks of binding their kings and nobles. By our praise we bind the powers of Satan. We are no match for the unseen forces of Satan. He has so many advantages over us, but we have a weapon that negates all his advantages, and that is the weapon of praise. Wiersbe says we have neglected our greatest weapon for overthrowing empires and changing the world, and the sad part is, we are content to do so. Praise is like any other weapon. You have got to train, practice, and learn how to use it. But since we have not been trained, we don't want to bother. If someone came around offering to teach anyone how to use a bazooka, most of us would pass, for we don't see any relevance to knowing how to shoot it. So it is with praise. It is a powerful weapon of spiritual warfare, but we do not see its relevance, and so we don't bother with the discipline of training. The result is we go marching into life's battle without our sword, and it is no wonder that we seldom take over territory under the control of evil forces.

Neh. 8:10 says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." This means the lack of joy is your weakness. When you are not in a spirit of joyful praise, you are vulnerable to enemy attack. Why do Christians get down and depressed, and even have total breakdowns? I do not want to be simplistic as if there are not dozens of different factors, but the bottom line is, they are unarmed. They are fighting enemy forces without the weapon of worshipful praise. Study any period of great revival in the history of the church and you will find a revival of praise, and an outburst of new songs. William Taylor wrote, "He who has a new song in his mouth is ever stronger, both to suffer and to labor, than the man who has a dumb spirit and a

hymnless heart."

Whatever you do, praising God will make you do it better. Praise God at work, and you will enjoy your work better, or tolerate it better. Praise God in your home, and you will have a better home life. Praise God as you drive, and it will not be the torture it is for those who only gripe and complain about all the idiots on the road. Praise is your weapon to counteract all the ways Satan tries to defeat you in the Christian life. Without praise you are like fish in a barrel to the enemy of your soul. This Psalm says song and sword go hand in hand. Worship and warfare are not worlds apart. They are side by side, and you need the one to deal with the other. You need the song to do well with the sword.

Praising God is the most practical activity there is, for it is the source of your strength. The praise Psalms are our weapons, for Heb. 4:12 says, "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edge sword." I have had New Testaments with the Psalms in them, but never realized I was carrying my sword when I had it, for I had no idea of the power of praise.

I was fascinated by Judson Conwell's book Let Us Praise. As a pastor he got all excited about a ministry of demon exorcism, and he began to focus on casting out demons. He had services on Sunday for this purpose, and he noticed he was becoming so demon-centered that Christ was put on the back burner. He came under the conviction of the Holy Spirit that he was to praise Jesus, and not get his focus on demons. It was hard to break the pattern, but he finally did, and when he began to focus on praising Jesus he found he and his church stopped having so many problems with demons.

Satan is very subtle. He can get us so involved in battles of all kinds that we are actually more under his control than that of Christ.

The thing we need to ask about all we do is this: Is this helping me to keep my eyes on Jesus, and, is it motivating me to sharpen my focus on praising and exalting His name? Satan would love to see us fighting so many skirmishes with various demons of evil that we have no time or energy for praise. He is winning, no matter how many minor victories we may win, if he can keep us from our big gun and most powerful weapon-the weapon of praise.

Praise keeps us power oriented, but lack of praise leads us to be problem oriented. When we do nothing but focus on problems we tend to be led downward to pessimism and discouragement. Many Christians even get depressed in prayer because their prayer is almost totally negative, and dealing with problems. We need to balance out prayer with praise so we do not become problem centered. The praise-centered Christian is the most victorious Christian.

In Dostoevski's The Brother's Karamazov, Ivan imagines he sees the devil, and a conversation takes place in which the devil says, "If I could praise God, I would cease to be the devil." I don't know how theologically correct that is, but it is true for men. If they praise God, they will cease to be devil-centered and self-centered, and become God-centered. The key to change of character and attitude is the power of praise. Probably the greatest power of praise is the power of it to please God. Look at verse 4 which says, "For the Lord takes delight in His people. He crowns the humble with salvation." Praise pleases God, and He in turn blesses those who praise, and this leads those who praise to have all the more praise. The next verse says, "Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds." Not all of life is a battle. Sometimes we just relax on our beds and rejoice in the good life of being a child of God, and an object of His delight.

As Americans we have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but this means to most people the pursuit of pleasure, which does not lead to happiness, except during the moments of pleasure. Real happiness is found in one's awareness that he is honored by God. God delights in him, and loves him as His child. This is an honor that never gets on the great TV award shows. It never gets a large gold or silver trophy, but it is life's greatest honor, and it goes to those who praise God and rejoice in Him, and ever sing new songs of joy. This is the life-style that pleases God, and the reward is His delight and salvation. Happiness is not something you pursue as much as something you get as a by-product of pleasing God by being a praiser.

If God is happy with you, because you are happy with Him, you are on the highest level of happiness. Spurgeon said, "The thought of the Lord's taking pleasure in us is a mine of joy never to be exhausted." In Psa. 147:11 we read it again: "The Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love." Just as we delight when our child or grandchild will leap to us from a table in full confidence that we will catch them, and not let them fall, so God delights in us when we trust and appreciate Him. The happiest children in this world are those whose parents delight in them, for delighted parents are loving, caring, forgiving, and generous in their giving. So the happiest Christians in this world are those in whom God is delighted. This Hebrew word for delight is used frequently to refer to God's pleasure.

If you get a great deal of pleasure out of one, two, or three children, or grandchildren, think of the pleasure God gets out of hundreds of millions of children who praise Him. And why do they praise Him? Because as verse 4 says, "He crowns the humble with salvation." The KJV has it, "He beautifies the meek with salvation." The idea of beauty is more accurate for the Hebrew word here is

paar, which means, to make beautiful. It is used in Isa. 60:13 to refer to the beauty of the temple. "The glory of Lebanon will come to you, the pine, the fir, and the cypress together, to adorn the place of my sanctuary..." Adorn is the Hebrew word paar. God is pleased by trees, plants, and flowers that beautify the environment where He is worshipped. Beauty, worship, and salvation are all linked in the Bible, and we add to the beauty with voices of praise. The flower praises God by being beautiful, and we praise Him by beautiful sounds.

Beauty is to characterize all that is involved in worship. God is beautiful in His splendor and holiness, and the sanctuary is to be beautiful; the music is to be beautiful, and the people are to be beautiful. There will be nothing ugly in heaven, and the closer we can get to total beauty in time, the closer we get to heaven. The same word paar is used two others times in Isa. 60. One refers to the temple and the other to the people. In verse 7 God says, "I will adorn my glorious temple." In verse 9 it says, "He has endowed you with splendor." Splendor is the same word as, to beautify, to adorn, and to crown. We could do further studies of this word, but the point is clear: beauty is important to God, and one of the most beautiful things in life is victory over evil. The beauty of praise leads to the beauty of victory over evil.

There are some who take praise as their spiritual weapon very seriously. Most of us would be inclined to see prayer as our weapon. This is certainly valid. Al Trefetheran gave me a missionary letter that told of a medical missionary in Africa who had to travel by bicycle for two days to get medical supplies. This meant he had to camp in the jungle overnight. To make a long story short, there was a group of young men who knew he had money and medicine. They were going to rob him and kill him. But as one of them told the story later, they backed off when they saw him surrounded by 26 armed

guards. The medical missionary was all alone and could not understand this providential protection until he came home to Michigan. There he learned that on that very night he was camping his church called for a special prayer time for him, and the number of men who came together for that time of intercession was 26. Amazing, yet more in line with our experience and familiarity with the power of prayer.

Similar miraculous intervention is happening because of praise. Michael Colem and Ed Lindquist founded Hosanna Music a few years back and discovered the Christian world is thirsting for praise songs. They now mail praise cassettes to hundreds of thousands all over the world on a regular basis, and they learn of the power of praise as a weapon in spiritual warfare. For example, Don Moen, director of Integrity Music, was the leader of a young musicians group travelling on a bus across Poland to the Soviet Union. They were carrying 24 master cassettes of the New Testament, and 3 high speed duplicators to copy tapes and distribute them to underground Christians all over the Soviet Union.

The penalty for trying to smuggle this into Russia was an automatic 10 years in prison. But they felt compelled to take the risk to get the word of God to people. They had wrapped all in packages and spray painted them black. When the bus neared the border Don went to the front of the bus and led them in praise with every song they could remember. They exalted Jesus as Lord of all and sought by praise the power of his protection. When they came to the border they were ordered out of the bus and two guards began to search everything. The older guard was in charge, and a younger guard, who seemed to want to find something to please his superior. When he came to the transformer where they had hidden the tapes, he was going to take it apart. Their hearts sank, but the older guard yelled at him that he was taking too much time. The older guard actually

apologized for the younger one. The young one stopped, and the group was convinced that their worship and praise was the weapon that defeated the plan of Satan at that point.

Praise is a form of prayer for it is not just horizontal music which talks about God. It is vertical music which talks to God. When we sing to exhort or encourage, or to evangelize, that is horizontal music directed at people. But in praise it is God who is the audience, and we are singing to Him. When we praise God we are no longer mere spectators in the battle of life. We are soldiers who are making a difference in the power level of the kingdom of God. Without praise we are unarmed, but with praise we are ready both to stand and defend the faith, and to attack and take territory held by the enemy. Praise is both a defensive and offensive weapon.

Words are weapons for good or evil. Jesus said in Matt. 12:34, "For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." If the heart is full of awful crud, the mouth will bring forth evil, complaining, gossip, and foul words. If the heart is full of gratitude, awe, and joy in the Lord, the mouth will overflow with praise. Praise is an external symbol of the inner life. You reveal the state of your heart by your words. If you are always griping and complaining, people will know what your heart is like, and God knows you are fighting life's battles with a dull sword. You are as ineffective as one trying to slice cheese with a golf club. But if praise flows from your mouth you reveal a heart filled with love, joy, and peace in the Lord. Your sword is like a laser beam able to cut through solid steel, and you are a weapon that God can use to defeat the schemes of principalities and powers. There is power in praise that we cannot measure, for we can never fully know how God uses praise for the conquering of the forces of darkness.

Praise brings us into the presence of God, and in His presence

there is power. Don Moen wrote this song:

**I just want to be where you are,
Dwelling daily in your Presence.
I don't want to worship from afar,
Draw me near to where you are.**

**I want to be where you are,
Dwelling in your Presence;
Feasting at your table,
Surrounded by your glory,
In your Presence,
That is where I always want to be.**

Heaven is the final fulfillment of this desire, but praise is the present experience of this desire. Praise takes us into God's presence, and in that presence there is power. May God help us to keep this weapon clean, oiled, and very active, that we might experience in the daily battles of life, the power of praise.

3. THE PINNACLE OF PRAISE Based on Psa. 150

A little girl was saying her prayers, and her mother suggested she ask God to get uncle John a job. The little girl considered this a good idea, and so she included this in her requests. The next evening when it was time to say her prayers again the mother reminded her to pray for uncle John to get a job. The little girl looked up at her mother in surprise and asked, "What was wrong with the job I got uncle John last night?"

There are adults who are convinced this is to be our attitude in

prayer. Just ask and believe and it is yours. Just name it and claim it. Others are equally convinced that we need to be persistent in prayer, and pray without ceasing, to make it clear to God it is not just a whim, but a sincere heart-felt desire. There is debate on prayer, but there is no debate on praise, for the Bible evidence is so overwhelming that it convinces all that praise is to be perpetual, persistent, and never ending. There may be a limit to how many times you pray to God for something, but there is no limit as to how many times you praise God for something. The Psalms are filled with never ending praise.

Going through the Psalms is like climbing a mountain. You don't just go straight up, for there are valleys to go down into on the way up. There are cliffs to go around, and so the journey to the top takes you up and down, and around, and covers a lot of ground. The Psalms take us into the valleys of lament, discouragement, and depression, and there are times when the Psalmist is singing the blues. But in the end he gets to the top, and the book of Psalms ends with a series of praise songs unmatched anywhere in the world. This is the pinnacle of praise, and Psa. 150 is the grand finale.

James Stewart, the great Scottish preacher, wrote, "All the way through the book of Psalms you feel that you are walking on a smoldering volcano of praise, liable to burst out at any moment into a great flame of gratitude to God." In the last 6 Psalms we are in the heart of that erupting volcano of praise, and in this last Psalm all heaven breaks loose as the angels of heaven join man in the earthly sanctuary in a universal praise of God.

If you are superstitious about the number 13, you will be glad to know the Bible is not. 13 times the word praise is used in this brief Psalm. There are no unlucky numbers for God. Praise Him 13 times and you will be blest. W. Graham Scroggie said, "Was there ever so

much said in 37 words as is said here?" That is all there is in the Hebrew. There are just 37 words and 13 of them, over one third, are the word praise. What does this Psalm tell us?

- 1. Who is to be praised?-the Lord.**
- 2. Where is He to be praised?-in the sanctuary, and in the mighty heavens.**
- 3. Why is He to be praised?-for His acts of power, and His surpassing greatness.**
- 4. What are the ways He is to be praised?-by instruments and by voice.**
- 5. Who is to praise Him?-everything that has breath.**

This is also the Hallelujah Chores of the Hebrew hymnal, and it calls for total inclusiveness. Every voice and every instrument are to join in the reverberation of jubilation that fills the universe with praise to God. Praise the Lord is one word in Hebrew. It is hallelujah, and this Psalm begins and ends with hallelujah. You might feel inadequate to join such a choir and orchestra, but if you have breath, you are invited. It does not say, if you have pitch, and tone, and can read music, and can sing harmoniously. It says, if you have breath, join in this universal praise. There are many groups we would not qualify for, and we would not be so presumptuous to even audition, but for praising God we all qualify.

Do you sing in the choir? Most of us would say no, and, thereby, be guilty of speaking falsely again, for as children of God we are all in the universal choir that offers unto God the sacrifice of praise. If you are breathing you are in this choir. Why are the Psalms forever urging us to praise? They urge the whole world to do so. They urge the nations of the world to praise God. They urge the world of nature to praise God. They urge the angels of heaven to praise God. They urge God's people to be in perpetual praise. Why this obsession- this

magnificent obsession with praise?

Because the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, and the primary way we do this is by praise. Every being and every created thing fulfills its purpose for existence in the praise of their Creator. Spurgeon in his Treasury of David writes of this Psalm, "We have now reached the last summit of the mountain chain of Psalms. It rises high into the clear azure, and its brow is bathed in the sunlight of the eternal world of worship. It is a rapture. The poet-prophet is full of inspiration and enthusiasm. He stays not to argue, to teach, to explain, but cries with burning words, Praise Him, Praise Him, Praise Ye the Lord."

In other words, this Psalm is pure praise. It is a call for all-inclusive praises to God. It is inclusive of the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary, and thus, inclusive of men and angels. It is inclusive of both God's acts of power and God's being. It is inclusive of all the kinds of musical instruments, and it is inclusive of both instrumental and vocal music. It basically has no other purpose than that of getting you to join the universe in response to the Creator of all that is, with praise.

Westminster Abbey in London is one of the greatest shrines of the English speaking world. It memorializes the men and women who have made immense contributions to our way of life. Just inside the main entrance on the floor in the center aisle is a large brass plate in memory of W. H. Auden, a leading poet of this century. These words are engraved on it:

**In the prison of his days
Teach the free men how to praise.**

They came from a poem Auden wrote in which he says that the duty

**of any poet in this difficult fallen world is to give man a reason to sing.
He wrote:**

**Follow, poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice.
In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start
In the prison of his days
Teach the free man how to praise.**

The Psalms are the Bible poets labor to do just that, and this final lesson in Psa. 150 makes a powerful point that true praise must be God-centered. 13 times the word praise is used, and all 13 of them have just One they refer too. Every praise is praise the Lord; praise God, or praise Him. We are looking at a spiritual pyramid here. The base is broad and all inclusive of all that has breath, and all instruments, but the pinnacle narrows to a point that focuses on One and no other. It is not wrong to praise others, for the same word for praising God is used for the praise of the king, ones wife, and other people. We can praise our heroes, our country, our flag, and anyone or anything for which we feel strong admiration.

The point of the Psalm, and all the rest of the Bible, is that when it comes to worship there is only one target of praise, and that is God. Miss this target and you have not worshipped. You can praise the pastor, praise the choir, adore the sanctuary, and admire the stain glass, and be in awe at the organ, or the high arches of the Cathedral; you can go through a host of positive feelings, and feel wonderful about the whole experience, and not have worshipped one second if you offered no sacrifice of praise to God. On the other hand, you may be disappointed in all of the above, and have no positive

emotions stimulated by the environment, or actions of worship leaders, yet have a great experience of worship if you have, by your voice, or in the silence of your mind, praised your Lord.

True worship is not in how you feel, but in who you praise and adore. You have to take the positive feelings that may be stimulated in a positive worship setting and direct them toward God, for if you do not praise Him, your experience, no matter how pleasant, is not worship. A.W. Tozer, one of the great writers on worship, wrote, "I want to warn you against the religion that is no more than love, music, and poetry. I happen to be somewhat of a fan of good music. I think Beethoven's nine symphonies constitute the greatest body of music ever composed by mortal man. Yet I realize I'm listening to music; I'm not worshipping God necessarily. There's a difference between beautiful sounds beautifully put together and worship. Worship is another matter."

Worship has to be God-centered to be authentic. It is not that you can't truly worship by listening to Beethoven. Many hymns are sung all over the world to the music of Beethoven. One of my favorites is Ode To Joy, or Hymn To Joy from his ninth symphony. The problem is, it is so easy to stop short of worshipping God, and be content with the positive feelings of experiencing the music.

This was the very issue of the women at the well who got into a discussion with Jesus about worship. She tried to make the place of worship an issue. The leaders of Israel tried to make the rituals an issue. Jesus said all of these things are irrelevant. The only real issue in worship is your attitude toward God. Do you worship Him in spirit and in truth, for that is what God is seeking. If your heart and mind are led to focus on God, then, and only then, have you truly worshipped. We have become such an entertainment oriented society that we judge everything by how it stimulates our interest. If we

come to church with this spirit, and the music and the message are not entertaining, we feel it is a boring experience. This makes worship a completely self-centered experience.

I have been bored many times in what was suppose to be a worship experience. And the reason I was is because I had this same self-centered perspective. I was judging the service based on what it was doing for me without realizing the goal was to praise God, and that the value for me was to be a by-product of my being God-centered in my focus. We need to reprogram our minds and listen to the focus of Psalm 150. It says, praise the Lord, praise God, and praise Him, praise Him, praise Him. Get your mind on Him. Bruce Leafblad, a leading authority on worship wrote:

"So much of our recent history has been slanted toward developing a receiving mentality as Christians: God exists to meet our needs, to give us blessings, to fill us up. So when we come to church, it is with our hands cupped open so they can be filled again. We have become professional beggars in the courts of the Lord, and we have to turn that around so we see ourselves as "offerers," not "receivers."

We come to give to God the sacrifice of praise, and what we go away with is a by-product of that experience of true worship. It will be far more than we will go away with if all we come for is to get and not to give. We come to church to celebrate who God is and what He has done. Anything short of this is not true worship. God hated all of the elaborate rituals and sacrifices of His people in the temple when their hearts were far from Him. It was all meaningless religion, even though from man's point of view very beautiful and emotionally moving. God despised it because it was a man-centered worship. They had no desire to glorify God and be channels of His will in the

world. They only desired His approval of their will. The Old Testament is full of elaborate worship that is wicked worship, because it is man-centered and not God-centered.

If you read books on worship today, you will find the main criticism of worship is that it is man-centered. People go to church, not to worship God, but to be entertained. The bigger the show the better the crowd. I think entertainment is an important part of life, but it is not worship. It is not impossible for it to lead to worship if your pleasure leads you to praise God, but if you just experience your own pleasure, and do not praise God and give Him pleasure, your very positive feelings could be harming your experience of true worship. It takes a conscious effort on our part to let all we experience lead us to praise God. It is not automatic, nor is it easy. What is easy is to just experience our own feelings as an end in themselves rather than as a means to the end of praising God.

If you feel guilty for your failure to be all God has willed for you, then praise God that He loves you enough to forgive you and give you a second, third, fourth, and many chances to be faithful. Praise God for His forgiving grace, and for being faithful when you are not. If you feel good and enjoy the music and the message, and get more light for the Christian walk, then praise God and thank Him for His love and His resources to guide you to be more Christlike. True worship is such a paradox for it is something we are to take very seriously, and yet it is to be enjoyable. It is fun to praise God and enjoy Him. You would conclude this if you studied the 50 Hebrews words and the 26 Greek words in the Bible for praise. These 76 words cover such experiences as-

Laud and celebrate.

Shout and sing.

Shout with joy.

**Clap and make music.
Dance and skip about.
Play and leap.
To jump with joy.**

I don't know about you, but this gives me an impression of a good time. Sad people do not do these sorts of things. God expects us to enjoy Him, and all of these words are ways we enjoy others as well. It is party language and wedding terminology. You don't call the band in for a funeral, but Psa. 150 calls for the trumpets, the tambourine, and the cymbals. Every sound an instrument can make is to call our attention to God that we might praise Him and enjoy Him.

The Bible is so insistent on praise because it is in praise that all being relates to God, and praise makes it a relationship of beauty. A female student at a university once said to the visiting speaker, "I can't see that life has any meaning whatever!" The speaker looked at her unusually pretty dress and said, "That is a very beautiful dress you are wearing! Why did you choose it? You could have chosen an ugly dress. Is there something that makes you feel beauty is better than ugliness? And if so, may that not be the clue to the meaning of life? Must there not be something beautiful at the heart of the world that won't let you rest content with ugliness?"

The Psalms call us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Worship is to be beautiful, and we are to add to the beauty of it, a beautiful spirit of praise. Beauty is the goal of God for the universe, and that goal will be achieved. Right now it is a fallen world full of the ugliness of sin, and it is our job to rise above the ugly and offer the beautiful sacrifice of praise. It is our task to live a life that adds order to chaos and beauty to ugliness. All that is ugly in our acts and attitudes comes short of the glory of God, and is part of the problem. All that is beautiful in our acts and attitudes is for the glory of God,

and is part of the solution. Praise is part of the answer to all of life's problems, because it is a creating of beauty.

The Dean of Women at a Western University found that telling girls what was right or wrong failed to have an impact on them. But if she said, "That would be beautiful," or, "that would be ugly," she got the desired results. Morality can be better taught sometimes by the terms beauty and ugly, rather than by the terms right and wrong. Even in an age of confused morality people are touched by these categories. Everyone prefers their life to be beautiful rather than ugly.

The Christian is one who makes life beautiful by means of praise. The goal of praise is to glorify God, but it also helps us to be agents of His glory in a fallen world. Praise gives us balance, and helps us go into an ugly world with hope, faith, and meaning. The goal is not escape, even though that can be helpful for a time. The goal is to go back into an ugly world with light to call attention to the beauty that is ever real no matter how real the ugly is. The praiser can go into a fallen world with optimism, because he or she knows that ugly as reality is, there is the beauty of God's love, and the beauty of the Gospel of Christ, and the beauty of God's promise, and the beauty of eternity. All of life's meaning is found in beauty, and we are to be agents of that beauty in a world of ugliness. The ugly is to motivate us to see why we are to be agents of beauty.

Most of the things that Christians reject as fitting for their lifestyle are things that fail to make their life more beautiful. It may not be an absolute evil to smoke or to drink, but the question is, does it beautify the life, or make it more ugly. Slavery was conquered because it was shown to be ugly. So it is with child abuse, drug use, promiscuous sex, and many other such practices. If you can show that something takes away beauty and adds ugliness to life, you can show that it is not a

practice fitting for a Christian life. Louis Untermeyer wrote:

**Open my eyes to visions girt
With beauty, and with wonder lit-
But let me always see the dirt,
And all that spawn and die in it.**

**Open my ears to music; let
Me thrill with Spring's first flutes and drums-
But never let me dare forget
The bitter ballads of the slums.**

**From compromise and things half-done,
Keep me, with stern and stubborn pride;
And when, at last, the fight is won,
God, keep me still unsatisfied.**

We must stay ever unsatisfied with what is, so we will never cease to work at what can be, by the grace of God. We must be ever worshiping in the beauty of holiness that we might be channels of that holy beauty in a world that so desperately needs it. So it is for God's sake; our sake, and for our needy world's sake that we must be ever climbing up toward the pinnacle of praise.

4. UNIVERSAL PRAISE Based on Psa. 117

If you think Psalm 117 is a short chapter, you are right, for it is the shortest in all the Bible. But it is twice as long in English as it is in the original Hebrew. It is 33 words in English, but only 17 in the Hebrew. And it is another of the many paradoxes of the Bible, for small as it is,

it deals with the largest subject in the Bible. All the people's of the world, more even than the United Nations, for it is absolutely universal. It also deals with the universal love of God and His everlasting faithfulness. So as small as it is, it is a door that leads us into a Cathedral of praise that is infinite.

I must confess that I have never given it a lot of thought, for it is so short that it seems irrelevant, but we need to see that it is like a modern day chorus. It is very short compared to a hymn, yet, it can be a powerful tool for praise. Length does not mean strength. William Graham Scroggie wrote, "Here, indeed, is a gem, likely to be overlooked because of its minuteness." It is clearly overlooked, for there are many commentaries and books of sermons on the Psalms that just skip Psa. 117, for it seems too small to bother with. The assumption is that it cannot be very important if there are only two verses. The Psalm before it has 19 verses, and the Psalm after it has 29 verses. So the theory seems to be that more is better, and so a measly 17 words cannot be very significant.

How God must laugh at us, like we do the little child, who goes for the big nickel and leaves the little dime unclaimed. Most Christians will go through life and never once claim this little gem as a precious part of God's Word. The Interpreter's Bible says, this little Psalm exhibits ideas that are among the loftiest of the Old Testament." The basis for world missions is found in this little chorus.

Do you think it is mere coincidence that Psa. 117, 118, and 119 are all located together? Psa. 117 is very small, Psa. 118 is medium size, and 119 is the longest in the Bible. The shortest and the longest chapters of the Bible are separated by an average size chapter: Small, medium, and large, in that order. The very structure of the Bible has a message. God uses all sizes for His glory. The size of a song, or anything else, is not an issue. The issue is, does it help us

worship God in spirit and in truth? The child, the teen, and the adult are all tools that can be used for God's glory. The small church, the medium size church, and the large church are all part of God's plan. Size does not matter to God, for His Word is composed of songs of all sizes, and we want to see how even the smallest of them can convey a big and vital message.

I. THE UNIVERSAL INVITATION TO PRAISE v. 1.

This Psalm seems to be going the wrong way on a one way street. All around it the Psalms are focused on Israel. Psa. 116 ends with a focus on God's chosen people, and the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. Psa. 118 is also a narrow focus on Israel with the nations as enemies. In verse 10 we read, "All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off." The theme is about Israel as the object of God's salvation.

Now we come to Psa. 117, and it makes me think of an amusing incident that happened in New York City during a transportation strike. Certain heavily traveled streets were made one-way. Madison Ave. was one of these, and a man who was not in full possession of his faculties was stopped by an officer when he was caught going the wrong way. "Where are you going," the officer asked? The befuddled man responded, "I don't know, but I must be late, everybody else is coming back."

This is the feeling you get in reading Psa. 117, and trying to fit it into the context of the Jewish hymnal. It is going against the grain, and swimming up stream. There is no hint of Jewish exclusiveness here at all. It is so totally inclusive that universal is the only appropriate word. From the temple in Jerusalem, the very heart of Judaism, this universal invitation goes out to all the world to praise Jehovah, because the God of the Jews is equally the God of all people,

and He loves them just as He does the Jews. This is radical theology that many Jews never really grasped. They could sing this little song, and then go out and live with prejudice against these very people they just invited to be one with them in their praise to God. This is true of Christians too, and we can sing theology that is far above the level where we actually live.

"Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee," is a good example. Listen to the third verse: "Take my lips and let them be filled with messages for Thee: Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold-not a mite would I withhold." After we sing this we go and use our mouth and our money for that which does not glorify God at all. There is no ground for finger pointing at the Jews. They fell short of the glory of God. They sang beautiful things that they did not let influence their lives and thinking.

Nevertheless, it was a God inspired song, and was true, even if God's people did not take it to heart. The invitation still stands, and all people of the world are invited to praise God, for they are included in His plan. God so loved the world-that is all the nations and all the people of the world. That is the New Testament expanded version of Psa. 117. There has never been a time when God's plan was not universal. The idea that there are some people that God does not love is heretical. A study of the most hated peoples of the Bible reveals that they are included in God's plan of salvation.

This very Psalm could have been the last song Jesus sang before He went to the cross to die for the sins of the whole world. Let me explain: Psa. 113-118 are called the Hallel Psalms, or the Hymns of Praise. The Jews had a tradition of singing Psa. 113 and 114 before the Passover, and then after the Passover meal they sang Psa. 115-118. We read in Matt. 26:30 that following the Passover meal of Jesus and His disciples they kept this tradition and it says, "When

they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mt. of Olives." This Psalm was likely a part of that hymn. Jesus sang this universal invitation just before He made it possible for all people's of the world to be saved because of His sacrifice for all sin.

Most of the Psalms never get mentioned in the New Testament. But this, the shortest of them all, is used by the Apostle Paul to prove an important point in his letter the Romans. In Rom. 15:11 Paul quotes this first verse-"Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to Him, all you peoples." He uses this text to show that it has always been God's plan that the Gentiles would be one with the Jews as His people, and as one they would praise Him. This is what the New Testament church is to confirm and demonstrate as Jews and Gentiles unite in Christ to glorify God the Father.

The littlest Psalm plays a big role in conveying the universal plan of God. The nations did not really respond to this invitation until Jesus sent His church into all the world with the Gospel. But we do have some examples even in the Old Testament of pagan peoples who praised the God of Israel. Darius the Mede, Queen of Sheba, Naaman, are just a few. We can't look at them all, but let me share a couple of examples.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, so famous he is studied by most children in schools as the builder of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world-the hanging gardens of Babylon. Few know that he became a convert to Jehovah, and we have every reason to believe he will be in heaven. We have his personal testimony in Dan. 4:35. "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him who lives forever."

Can a pagan glorify the God of the Bible? If he becomes a

believer, he certainly can. This invitation of Psa. 117 is authentic when it says whosoever will may come, and praise the God who is the God of all peoples. Jonah wanted to keep Jehovah as the God of Israelites only, but when he preached that the great city of Nineveh was going to be destroyed in 40 days we read in Jonah 3:5, "The Ninevites believed God." They repented of their evil ways, and God had compassion on them. Hundreds of thousands of pagans were spared. It made Jonah mad, and he wanted to die because God would not be exclusively the God of Israel. But the Ninevites could rejoice, for they discovered the message of Psa. 117-that the God of Israel is the God of all nations, and loves all people.

In Psa. 138:4-5 we read of another universal call for royalty to praise God. We see a hint of what the Jews were chosen to do, but which they did not do, and that was to take the Word of God to all the world. It says, "May all the kings of the earth praise you, O Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth. May they sing of the ways of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord is great." Judaism was to be a missionary faith carrying the good news of Jehovah's love to all the world. They didn't do it, but they did sing about it as an ideal. Psa. 67 is another song about a universal outreach. Listen to verses 2-4: "May your ways be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.

The reason Jesus gave the church the great commission to go into all the world is because this has always been God's plan. The Old Testament saints failed, but it was always God's plan, and Jesus built His church out of both Jews and Gentiles to fulfill this plan which will succeed, for heaven will be filled with the praises of people from every nation and language. The universal invitation to praise God of Psa. 117 will be answered by all peoples.

The book of Revelation assures us that there will be people of every tribe and nation and language singing the praises of Jesus. This means an investment in missions is a sure thing. It will pay eternal dividends to get the Gospel to all the world. Darlene Bee wrote:

**Two thousand tribes without God's Word
In their own native tongue,
Two thousand tribes who've never heard
The praise of Jesus sung.**

**Oh, come ye saints; lift up your hands,
The Word you've long possessed-
But there are those in many lands
Who have not thus been blessed.**

**Take up thy pen! Translate the Word!
Complete the task begun!
'Till o'er the earth the Word is heard
In every mortal tongue.**

**These hungry souls with living bread,
Ye saints of God, now feed-
That they may know our Glorious Head,
And all His precepts heed.**

**Into the darkness shine the light,
Reveal God's saving grace-
That in dawn of glory bright,
They too may see His face.**

**Around the Throne a mighty band
Join as God's praise is sung,
From every kindred, tribe and land,**

Each in his native tongue.

The universal invitation to praise God will be received and responded to by all the peoples of the world. The second thing we want to look at is-

II. THE UNIVERSAL INSPIRATION FOR PRAISE. v.2

The Jews were often prejudiced against the Gentile nations of the world. They had a hard-nosed attitude of superiority as the chosen people of God. But this song they sang rose above their narrow mindedness. This song reveals that at the heart of Judaism there is a universal inspiration for praise. All the nations of the world came from the three sons of Noah. At that time everybody in the world worshipped Jehovah. All peoples on the planet descended from this family, and the goal of God has always been to bring all people back to their roots where they will again be one in praising Him. He selected Abraham to be the father of the people He would use to accomplish this goal. The Jews were chosen, not so they could be the only people to experience the love of God, but that God might have an instrument to convey His love to all peoples.

This Psalm makes it clear that God's love is universal. This Psalm is actually the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. Christ is not yet in this picture, but He is implied, for if God loves all people, and He is ever faithful in that love, then He will find a way to provide a salvation that makes it possible for all peoples to be a part of His eternal family. The full Gospel is here in seed form, but from the Old Testament point of view it says all that can be said to inspire universal praise. God is not miserly in His mercy, granting it to just a few. He is magnanimous, extending it to all peoples.

This shortest song has a message so long that it reaches out to all

the earth. It is like our doxology: "Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise Him all creatures here below." God's love is universal, therefore, it is a universal inspiration for praise. Spurgeon said, "This Psalm, which is very little in its letter, is exceedingly large in its spirit, for, bursting beyond all bounds of race or nationality, it calls upon all mankind to praise the name of the Lord."

There is no person on earth who cannot be inspired to praise God if they can be made to grasp that He loves them. Here is the Old Testament on a par with the New Testament in this essential truth: The God of the Bible loves all people. Usually when something is abundant it loses its value. Leaves and snowflakes have no economic value to most of us because nobody will pay for what they can have free. But this law does not hold true in the realm of spirit values. God's love is abundant beyond calculation, for it is universal. Yet, it is of greater value than diamonds or gold. There are some things that do not lose their value by being abundant. Praise is another reality that does not diminish with abundance. God does not say when 50% of the people of the world praise Him, He will put a halt to the Gospel of His love. His aim is for all people to praise Him, for its value is not diminished by abundance.

Man cannot get too much of God's love, and God cannot get too much of man's praise. That is why we have a Bible song that sets no limits on either. The universal love of God inspires the universal praise of man. Spiritual things are just the opposite of economic things. If God only loved a few, then His love would be of no value to most of mankind. It would, in fact, be worthless to all but the few. But being that God's love is for all, this makes it of infinite worth to all, for all can have the highest value this universe offers-God's love.

Because of the truth of this Psalm, all racism, all prejudice, all pride of class, and all perspectives which limit the universal love of

God to any specific people, are not only sub-Christian, they are sub-Judaism. In other words, they are pagan perspectives. They are offensive to God, for His goal is to communicate His universal love that there might be universal praise. God desires praise, and He deserves praise from all people. That is why we send and support missionaries.

David in Psa. 68:31-32 wrote, "Ethiopia will stretch out her hands to God in adoration. Sing to the Lord, O kingdoms of the earth-sing praises to the Lord." Ethiopia and Ethiopian are referred to 40 times in the Bible. It is a major Bible land. Phillip was the first missionary to the Ethiopians as he led the Ethiopian to Christ in Acts 8. There is a tradition of Christianity in Ethiopia from this one convert, but it was not until 1866 that Swedish missionaries planted the first permanent Protestant work in Ethiopia. Later the Sudan Interior Mission became strong in Ethiopia and founded 500 churches there.

The modern history of Ethiopia started with Menelik who claimed to be descended from Solomon. His favorite General had a son Halie Salassie who became the most famous Emperor in the history of Ethiopia. His full title was, "His Imperial Majesty, Halie Salassie, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, Elect of God, and King of Kings of Ethiopia." Christianity thrived under his reign. This land, and these people, are just one of many examples around the world of how God is seeing this Psalm fulfilled by universal praise.

5. THE PHYSIOLOGY OF PRAISE Based on Psa. 47:1-9

It was before my time, but I remember my parents talking about

going to see silent movies. The movies made no sound, but according to Sam Levinson in his book *Everything But Money*, the audience made plenty of sound. As the hero and the villain shot it out, each firing two thousand shots without loading, the audience would be providing the sound effects.

When the hero appeared everybody cheered, and when the villain came on everybody booed. When the hero kissed the girl 400 kids would kiss their elbows and fill the theatre with kissing sounds. He made it clear that silent movies were far from noiseless. He goes on, "We screamed warnings, we screamed approval, we screamed at each other. Fights broke out, We stamped, we whistled, we wept when the faithful dog whined over his master's wounded body." The point is, it was by making noise and movement that the people entered into and participated in the drama unfolding on the screen.

This is the same idea that we see in the worship experience of the Old Testament. It was not a passive experience, but one where the people participated and became very active by adding sound and movement of the body. There was also a place for silence and a quiet worship experience where the people would be still and sense the presence of God. Most of the songs of the Old Testament, however, were songs calling for sounds of all kinds. Psa. 47 for example begins, not with quiet meditation and prayer, but clapping of the hands and a shouting to God with cries of joy.

The noise level was likely something like that of the old theatre where people got their body involved in the experience. Body involvement in worship is a subject we do not often think about, but the Bible is full of it. It is of interest that most of the hand clapping in the Bible is evil. That is, it is of the wicked clapping and rejoicing at the suffering of the people of God. Clapping was an expression of delight and approval, and evil people clap at evil for they approve of

it and get pleasure in it, just as people today clap for comedians who use the foulest of language and ridicule God. But in contrast to man who claps more for evil, the world of nature is always pictured as clapping its hands for the glory of God.

In Psa. 98:8 we read, "Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy." In Isa. 55:12 we read, "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands." Nature makes a lot of noise in praising God. The bottom line is, where there is a lot of noise, there is action and involvement, and so worship was noise oriented because man was to make sounds to express his praise of God, and joy in the Lord. Nature joins him, for nature by its very being and beauty praises its maker, just as any work of art is the glory of its creator. The Bible answers the age old question: "If a tree falls in the woods, and there is no one there to hear it, does it make a noise?" The answer is yes, because there is always someone there to hear it-God. He hears every clap of every tree in the forest.

This Psalm was part of the New Years Day celebration in the synagogue where they sing it 7 times and then blow the trumpets. The same Hebrew word for clap here is used over 40 times for blowing the trumpet. The idea is to make a joyful noise. In order to do that you have to go beyond the heart, mind, and soul, and love God with all your strength. That means with the instrument by which you produce energy, which is your body. You can pray silently but in a public expression of worship praises are to be fairly loud, for they are symbolic of enthusiastic thanksgiving. What if you went to a Fourth of July celebration and they said that this year we are going to have a quiet celebration and just light candles? The protest would be wild because noise is necessary to convey the joy and gratitude for our freedoms in this land. How much more should there be noise of joy

when we celebrate the grace of God?

The volume that comes out of the mouth seems to be a Biblical issue. Listen to these verses:

Psa. 98:4, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth; make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise."

Psa. 32:11, "Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."

The New Testament does not tone it down at all, but keeps the volume of praise on high:

Rev. 7:10, "And cried with a loud voice, salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

Rev. 19:1, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, shouting hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.."

Praise in the distant past and in the infinite future is loud because it is to be an emotional release of joy. It is to be like the feelings we have when our team wins a great game, and we are thrilled and shout for joy. This, of course, explains why we do not do a lot of clapping and shouting. We just do not generate the internal energy needed to move the body to these levels of intensity. Different cultures and different people in each culture develop the levels of emotion they feel is appropriate. In England for example, Dr. Baxter says, for a certain type of Englishman to say that something was not without interest would be equivalent to saying there was "A Frenchman dancing in the streets with garlands in his hair." Most Americans are not that stuffy, but neither are we so free as those in the Bible lands. They kiss and hug in ways we do not feel comfortable about.

When Boaz let Ruth glean in his field, and let her eat with his

workers, she was so grateful she fell on her face and asked, "Why have I found favor in your sight?" You can do a lot of nice and generous things for people, but I can guarantee they will not be falling on the ground at your feet to thank you. It is too radical and too emotionally expressive, and too much bodily involvement for our culture. A handshake and a thank you is quite sufficient in our culture.

There are many examples of Biblical customs where the body is used to express emotions that we do not follow. In other words, we are products of a culture different from the Biblical culture. We do not fall at the feet of anyone as was a common custom of people in the Bible. If their king visited, they would bow and kneel, but in our culture we do not bow to leaders but merely stand and clap to honor them. We honor people by standing in their presence rather than bowing. That is an obsolete bodily movement in our culture. It does not mean we honor people less. We just have a different way of showing it.

We cannot escape the fact that the Bible does command and urge us to use the body to make noise and movements to communicate our honor and praise to God. In Psa. 134:2 we read, "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord." In Psa. 141:2 we read, "May the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice." What does this mean? How can lifting your hands be like a sacrifice? The first part of the verse helps us get an idea. "May my prayer be set before you like incense." Just as prayer ascends to God like incense, so the lifted hands represent the body being lifted up in sacrifice to God's service. The steeple points up to God to represent a place of worship, and the hands uplifted represents a person who longs to ascend also to worship and be pleasing in God's sight, like an ascending incense. It is a symbol of the heart and mind. The body pictures what the mind thinks and the heart feels. The body is a tool for the heart and mind

to express themselves.

You know that in the male and female relationship it is not enough to just think nice thoughts about each other. It is not enough to feel loving toward one another. The heart and mind can be all they ought to be in feeling and thought, and yet nobody would be satisfied. Love has to be expressed to be real and adequate. This means the body has to be the tool by which the heart and mind express love. The body through the mouth speaks forth the love. The body kisses, caresses, and develops the deepest possible intimacy with the one loved. The heart and the mind need the body to fulfill their love. The reason both the Old Testament and the New Testament use the husband and wife relationship to illustrate the God and man relationship is because the body becomes the key to the full expression of love in both the romantic and religious experience. Both need the body to be complete.

God is not content for you to feel love for Him, and to think loving thoughts about Him. He wants it expressed through your body, for your body is the visual revelation of your love. The body makes love incarnate where it can be seen and heard. Incarnation was the way God revealed His true love for us. He sent His Son into the world to take on a body, for only God in a body could communicate just how much He loved us. By means of the incarnation God made the feelings of His heart and the thoughts of His mind visible to us. And so it is that we, by our body, make our heart and mind visible to God. Yes, He looks on the heart, and He knows the mind of man, but until it is expressed in the body, it is only potential love, and not love fully realized because it has not been fully expressed.

So worship and praise needs to have a physical side to it to be authentic and real. That is why the clapping of the hands, the lifting of the hands, the dancing, the singing, the kneeling, and the playing of

instruments are a vital part of worship. From the head to the feet the body is used to praise God. Your dog may be able to feel love and loyalty to you without wagging its tail, but that joyful wagging makes you feel good, for it says to you that the dog is happy you are home. It is a bodily symbol of the dog's heart feeling. When the baby smiles at your expression of love, and you know it's not just gas, but an expression of true delight in your presence, it makes you feel good. Body language is a very important part of communication. The body of all those we love conveys a message of the soul, and that is what our body is to do in our worship of God. The body is to say, "I really love you, and I am delighted to be in your presence."

In our culture we have so separated the sensual and the spiritual that we do not even realize how they are linked. The Biblical saints knew their entire body, with all of its five senses, was participating in worship. The beauty of the architecture got their eyes involved. The beauty of the songs got their ears involved. The beauty of the incense got their nose involved. The beauty of the sacrifice got their mouth, or taste, involved. The beauty of the anointing oil and laying on of hands got their sense of touch involved. The whole point of all beauty in art, architecture, music, movement, and whatever else appeals to the aesthetic nature of man is to get the body to participate in the praises of God.

The resurrection of the body is a major Christian doctrine, and the reason is clear: Man is not fully man without a body, and God wants us to praise Him forever in the fullness of our being, and that demands an eternal body which can eternally respond to the infinite beauty of God's everlasting kingdom. Bodily worship is not a passing fad. It is eternal, and it is important to God, and should also be to us. To present our bodies as living sacrifices unto God involves the use of the body as a tool of worship.

It is old fashioned now, and not used, but the old Anglican wedding had these words in it: "With my whole body I thee worship." One lover was to say to the other, "My body will adore you, and your body alone will I cherish. I will with my body declare your worth." The body and its actions are key elements in expressing love. How we relate to our mate with our body tells them just how great our love is. God wants the total man involved in worship because man is not complete as mind and soul without the body. If we are going to love God with our whole being, then the body has to be a part of our worship of God.

When we are baptized we surrender our body to be immersed in water to symbolize our burial with Christ, and our recognition that in Him alone we are cleansed from all sin. The body rises out of the water to symbolize the resurrection and our commitment to walk with our Lord in newness of life. In communion we take bread and juice into our body to symbolize our participation in all He purchased for us in His body on the cross. The point is, the only two ordinances that Jesus left for the church to observe for all time are bodily expressions of obedience and acts of love. Jesus is saying, "Love me with your body. What you do with your body is a major factor in communicating the reality of your love."

Even the very act of coming to church is a bodily act of love and worship, for by getting your body to the house of God you declare the worth of God in your life. We read in the Old Testament of the saints going to the temple. In the New Testament we read of the saints being urged not to forsake the assembling of themselves together. Why the big deal on going to a place to worship? It is because it is necessary to get your body involved in declaring the worth of God in your life. You can stay home and worship God with the aid of radio and television, and that can be meaningful, but you have not made a commitment of your body nearly as great as you do when you get it

ready and take it to the place where other believers are assembled for worship. You have loved God less than with all of your strength.

On the parallel level of romance it would be like calling your lover on the phone and having a nice talk. You do not go to all the trouble of getting your body into their presence. It is far more meaningful to have face to face contact. The point is, God reveals to us that it matters to Him what we do with our bodies as instruments of worship. In His eyes it is a measure of your love. If you use your body only for what pleases you, and seldom offer it as a living sacrifice in His service and worship, God is not fooled by words. Any lover knows how selfish you are if your body is only minimally involved in expressing love. Do you think God is less discerning, and can be snowed by a prayer or two?

What you do with your body is a major factor in your spiritual life. Worship is to God what romance is to your mate, and that is why God repeatedly calls idolatry, and the going after other gods, adultery. It is using your body unfaithfully. Your body and its movements are to convey your love for Him and no other. The worship of God is to be an exclusion, just as sex is in marriage. Clap your hands for the gods of this world, and you are unfaithful. Kneel before the idols of this age, and you are committing adultery. Sing the praises of the false images of materialism, humanism, etc., and you become a spiritual harlot.

This is what the prophets were saying all the time to God's people. You cannot be a spiritual person without the body being devoted to the Lord. It has to be surrendered and used for His glory, or it will send you astray, and be enticed by the sensual god's of this age. The implications of this are astounding, for what all this means is that everything is sanctified, made holy, and pleasing to God, when it is devoted to the exalting of His majesty and worth. Dancing, which we

think of as secular, can become sacred when it is movement of the body for the purpose of expressing joy in God.

We clap as a bodily act, and thereby we express the pleasure we feel in the presence of some beauty that has touched one of our senses. Clapping pleases God when we do it to say, "Thank you Lord for the beauty of your salvation, and for the beauty of your grace. We praise you with this bodily act of approval and appreciation." We don't just say it, for we know actions speak louder than words, and we want to shout it to the heavens saying, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

God looks for love expressed in body language. That is what all the clapping, shouting, and dancing are about in the Psalms. We do not have to imitate what they did, but we can work at awareness of our bodies being instruments of worship, and get them more involved. When the famous dancer Baryshnikov joined the New York City ballet, he said he wanted to be under the direction of the world renowned choreographer, George Balanchine because, "I would love to be the instrument in his wonderful hands." This is to be our attitude in worship. We actually do more dancing than we realize. Dancing is the movement of the body to music. Lavonne and I do walkarobics almost every evening, and it is movement of the body to music. I never thought of it as dancing, just as I have never thought of our movements in church as dancing, but any organized movement we do to music is a form of dance.

Since we do not think of it as music, we often do not display the grace and harmony we should. When the choir stands you notice that they all rise in unison, for that is part of the dance. If they popped up one here and one there at all different times, it would give an impression of discord. Their bodies are singing before their voices when they rise in unison. Often when we rise to sing as a

congregation we dance quit poorly, and are like one stepping on toes, for we have not taken seriously the beauty of harmonious bodily movement. We as leaders have not thought it through, and so we have not made an effort to coordinate your movements with the music, and work at uniformity.

The ushers as they come forward to receive the offering is another area of bodily movement that can be orderly and uniform, or chaotic. All we do in worship either adds to or subtracts from the grace of the dance. We will soon be seeing the graceful performance of figure skating champions. They move with such grace and beauty that our minds are in awe as we watch bodily movements as a work of art. Sports are also bodily movements that are so coordinated that they successfully accomplish a goal, which is usually getting a ball to some specific place. The movement of the stars and planets is God's work of precision art.

Physical movement is symbolic of the unseen world of mind and spirit. If the movement is that of a drunk who is uncoordinated and stumbles into things, breaking things, and falling down, you see a symbol of an impaired and fallen mind. When the movement is that of a skater who can do triple twists with the grace of a bird in flight, you see a symbol of an orderly mind that has been disciplined and committed to the display of beauty. All of this relates to worship in that when we use our bodies in harmonious movement we symbolize that we worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The Psalms urge us to do that, and our bodily movements are the way we do it. The universe moves with such precision and harmony as a dance to glorify the Creator. We too in worship are to sing and move in harmony as our dance to the glory of God.

Now let me stress an escape clause. We are not machines, and this is not a legalistic issue. It is a matter of great variety. As people

we have all kinds of limitations and handicaps, and so not all can do everything in unison. We do not spend a major portion of our lives practicing as do skaters. The goal is not to develop a professional group of worshipers, like a marching band in a military parade. The goal is to simply be aware that our bodies are a part of our worship, and they add to or detract from the praise we offer to God. We are to do all we do to the glory of God, and the movements we make in worship portray either joy or indifference.

If you had a dance where some were doing the waltz and others the polka, and still others trying to square dance, you would have utter chaos. Everybody in a group has to be dancing to the same tune. In church we need to work at this by getting all to dance in unity. Why? Because our bodily movements are part of our worship. We don't just think praise, but we offer it with our lips. We don't just feel thankful, but we express it by what we do with our lungs and tongue. We don't just remember what Christ did for us on the cross, but we take the bread and cup and by bodily action we commemorate that salvation event. The dance is a legitimate form of worship, but it has great limitations in our culture, just as other legitimate Biblical movements do. The washing of each others feet, the holy kiss, the tearing of our clothes in anguish, the beating of our breasts in confession, and the falling on our face to show respect, are just a few of such movements.

Our goal is not to try and impose an ancient culture on our modern culture, but to learn how we can praise God more effectively with our whole being-the body being a vital part of our being. Because we have not thought a lot about the physiology of praise we tend to practice a sort of disembodied worship of the mind and soul. We are cerebral celebrants, and this is not bad, for we are to love God with all the mind as well. The problem is, we neglect the role of the body. The body can add life to our praise. If our mind is saying,

"praise the Lord", but our body is saying, "Why did you drag me here, and when will I be able to go home and get a nap," you are sending mixed signals. The body is not in harmony with the mind and spirit, and the result is discord.

Ideal worship involves loving God with body, mind, and spirit, so that posture, gestures, and movement, all work together to say, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." The paradox of this focus on the physiology of praise is that it will make it worse rather than better for awhile, for we will be all the more conscious of our disharmony and uncoordinated movement. We will have to go through the bull in the china shop stage to get to the swan on the lake stage, but if we are serious about growing in our worship experience, we need to endure the pain of learning to do what leads to the enjoyment of greater pleasure. May God help us to praise Him with our whole being as we learn to practice the physiology of praise.

This song was written by me to the tune of Ode to Joy by Beethoven as an example of body praise.

**Clap your, Clap your, Clap your two hands
shout to God with cries of Joy.**

**Awesome is the Lord beyond man
He indeed is Lord most high.**

**Clap and shout and with great Joy sing
let your Savior see your mirth.
Let the whole world know He's your King
King of All Kings on the Earth.**

**Clap your hand and raise your voices
do not hide your love for Him.**

**God has given many choices
to prevent Love's growing dim.**

**With the body now we Praise you
with the tongue we praise your name.
Help us now to leave this Church pew
loving more than when we came.**

6. THE PLEASURE OF PRAISE Based on Psa. 84

In the movie, Chariots Of Fire, the great runner Eric Liddell was talking to his sister about going back to China as a missionary. Jennie was so pleased with his decision, but then Eric said, "I've got a lot of running to do first." When her look of happiness vanished, he responded, "Jennie, Jennie. You've got to understand. I believe God made me for a purpose-for China. But he also made me fast, and when I run I feel His pleasure. To give it up would be to hold Him in contempt."

Eric felt the pleasure of God when he did his best to use what God had given him. He was saying, pleasure is a two way street. God gives us pleasure, and we give God pleasure. Is this a Biblical reality? Yes it is. We can give the Lord of the universe great pleasure just as our children and grandchildren can give us great pleasure. The pain can be equally real, but that is so well known it is not a question. But the pleasure of God is seldom considered, even though a quick count showed 28 verses in the Bible that deal with the pleasure of God.

One of the things He is most pleased with is the praise of His people. If they feel pleasure in Him, and rejoice in thanksgiving for His goodness to them, He feels great pleasure. Psa. 69:30-31 says, " I

will praise God's name in song and glorify Him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox....." God does not get His pleasure in our ritual performance of sacrifices. His real pleasure is in our pleasure of Him that produces joy, which is, in turn, expressed by praise. Our spiritual pleasure gives God pleasure.

God is not impressed with power, for He has all power. He gets His pleasure from our attitudes of dependence, trust, and hope in Him. In Psa. 147:10-11 we read, "His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse, nor His delight in the legs of a man; the Lord delights in those who fear Him, who put their hope in His unfailing love." God reveals His feminine side in what He most enjoys. It is not the masculine stuff of power and strength, but the feminine stuff of feeling and personal relationships. Paul stress this feminine side of his personally too in I Thess. 2:7. "As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children."

Paul is saying, we could have been more masculine, and we could have been rough on you, but we were more feminine, and, therefore, gentle. And why? He tells us in verse 4: "We are not trying to please men but God." God is pleased when we deal with people with the feminine touch of gentleness. Men can choose to do this and give God pleasure. It was Paul's greatest goal in life to please God, and it should be ours as well. When we give God pleasure we are living life on the highest possible level.

There is an old story of a sculptor who made an image of an angel high on a Cathedral tower. He was asked why he bothered to make the back of it so perfect since no one would ever see it. He said, "God will and I labor to please Him." Some poet put the story in verse.

A sculptor on Cathedral tower,

**With patient care and toil,
An angel wrought--
A thing of beauty growing there,
Expression of the workman's
Noblest thought.
His fellow, scoffing, said;
"For naught
Thy pains, for who can note
At this far height?
He, rev'rent, answered; 'Nay,
My friend,
But this shall live
In God's eternal sight."**

When you get pleasure in pleasing God you are living in the spirit. But when you do not care if you please God or not, you are living in the flesh. Paul says in Rom. 8:8, "Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God." The purpose of Paul's instruction to the churches was to help them please God. He states this clearly in I Thess. 4:1. "Finally brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are now living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more."

Paul says Christian growth is growing in ones ability to please God. All you learn, and all you do in serving, and all you do in witnessing, and all you do in living the Christian life, is for the purpose of pleasure. It is for God's pleasure and your own, for the more you live to please God the more pleasure you get out of living. Heb. 11 tells us of the great saints of faith in the Old Testament. One of the first was Enoch who walked with God, and God took him to heaven without dying. Why was he one in a million? Because verse 5 says, he pleased God. There is no higher goal to aim for in life. To always please God is a definition of the perfect life. Jesus said in John

8:29, "The one who sent me is with me, he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him."

The goal in all we do as Christians is to please God, and that is also the goal of worship. Why do we worship God? The answer is to please Him, and by so doing enrich our own lives, and fill them with greater pleasure. Worship is often linked with boredom due to uninspiring music, and long tedious sermons that are much a do about nothing relevant to our lives. This is a reality we have to endure, but it is not true worship. True worship is pleasurable for both God and man. If there is no pleasure you have not worshipped. You have simply been present for a religious service. While you were bored out of your mind others around you may have worshipped, and felt great pleasure. We need to learn how to experience pleasure in worship for that is the whole purpose for coming to church. We could say, if there is no pleasure there is no treasure.

The Psalms are the treasure chest of worship, and we want to link what they teach to our verse by verse study of Psalm 84. The bottom line of the Psalms is the pleasure of praise. In Psa. 84:4 they are called blessed or happy who dwell in God's house and are ever praising Him. Praise is the perfect example of the double pleasure of worship. When we praise God we are feeling pleasure, for praise is an expression of pleasure. It is thanksgiving for God's being, and for His goodness, grace, and guidance. Praise feels good, and it makes God feel good when you feel good enough to praise Him.

In Heb. 13:15 we read, "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise-the fruit of lips that confess His name." He says in the very next verse, "With such sacrifices God is pleased." The pleasure of praise is a pleasure shared by God and man. Someone wrote, "Praise is the divine catharsis. Nothing so cheers the heart, and clears the mind and

purges the emotions as praise. There is nothing like praise to generate blessing, to pull heaven down, to propel our souls toward God and to prepare us for His presence. Praise is the secret of song, the source of strength, a cure for depression."

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. How do we do this? Walter Brueggmann in his book, Israel's Praise, tells us. "Praise is the duty and delight, the ultimate vocation of the human community; indeed, of all creation. Yes, all of life is aimed toward God and finally exists for the sake of God. Praise articulates and embodies our capacity to yield, submit and abandon ourselves in trust and gratitude to the One whose we are. Praise is not only a human requirement and a human need, it is also a human delight. We have a resilient hunger to move beyond self, to return our energy and worth to the One from whom it has been granted. In our return to that One, we find our deepest joy. That is what it means to "glorify God and enjoy God forever."

You note, he says praise is both a duty and delight. We tend to think of duty as a pain, but not so when it is linked to the praise of God. It is a Christian duty to be happy, and the shortest route to that goal is praise. The story is told of a wise man who asked his three sons what they were going for in life. The eldest said pleasure; the second said riches; the third said duty. Some years later he asked them how they had done. The eldest said pleasure is but a phantom that flies as one approaches. The second said pleasure is not in riches. But the youngest said as I walked with duty pleasure was ever at my side. The story teaches a Biblical truth. When we fulfill our duty to praise God pleasure will be by our side.

The reason praise is a duty is because it is a basic part of human nature to praise what is valued. We praise all that we treasure, and all which gives us pleasure.

**We praise people who please us.
We praise products which please us.
We praise programs which please us.
We praise politicians who please us.**

When we enjoy a great meal we praise the cook. When we see a great painting, or a work of art in any form, we praise the artist. A song well done will draw forth the clapping of hands which is an expression of praise. Anything that gives us pleasure produces in us the desire to praise that which produced the pleasure.

To worship God means to express His worth to us. If we do not praise God, we do not feel His worth. It means we do not feel any pleasure in who He is and what He has done for us. This is practical atheism, and that is why it is a duty to praise God. It is a duty to praise all who give you pleasure, for praise is one of the key ways by which we convey love. When we praise our mates we are saying to them, you please me and give me pleasure, and I am grateful to you. This keeps love alive for it makes partners feel they are fulfilling their role in the relationship. All relationships thrive on pleasure. If there is no pleasure the relationship will die. Thus, praise is a duty in all relationships, and that is why the book of Psalms is so full of praise. It is at the very heart of the God-man relationship.

Praise is love in action. It is the daughter crawling up into daddy's lap and hugging and kissing him. It is the son saying to mom, you are the greatest mom ever. Praise is love expressed so the loved one can feel they are loved. Thereby the pleasure of love is doubled, for both can then feel it. God feels this pleasure when He is loved by praise. He made us in His image so we all share this common need for such pleasure. Praise is a sign on every level that love is present, and pleasure is being enjoyed. The pleasure of praise is universal, and

that is why it is a duty and a delight to praise God, for only when we do praise do we truly worship.

No matter what we do in changing our patterns and forms of worship is of any value unless it leads to praise. That is the essence of worship, that which makes you feel like praising God. Ronald Allen writes with great wisdom in these two paragraphs:

"I am aware that the recent history of the church has been Beset with innumerable fads. One new idea about theology, Methodology, lifestyle, and church life follows another. Each is presented with fanfare and excitement. Each flashes and splashes, then sparkles and sputters, and then is replaced by another new idea. We are weary with fads.

But the praise of God is not a passing fancy! It is one of the most elemental, fundamental, and necessary factors of the life of faith in this and any age. It is the goal and direction of all creation. The praise of God is the occupation of all His holy angels. The praise of God is the purpose of man. The praise of God is the end result of all God's wonders, all His being, and all His acts. If man will not praise God, the very stones will! He has redeemed us for the praise of His glory. This is no fad!"

Here in our text in verse 4, they are called blessed who dwell in the house of God for they are ever praising God. The praise of God and the presence of God are linked, and this is because the praise of God produces the presence of God. God is everywhere present, but we are not conscious of His presence everywhere. But when we praise Him we become conscious of His presence, for praise brings us into His presence. To pray without ceasing and to praise without ceasing is the goal of the Christian life, and the state of ideal happiness.

In Psa. 34:1 David says, "I will extol the Lord at all times; His praise will always be on my lips." In Psa. 71:6 he says, "I will ever praise you", and in verse 24 he says, "My tongue will tell of your righteous acts all day long." The pleasure of praise is to be the most frequent pleasure we enjoy in life. Psa. 113:3, "From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets the name of the Lord is to be praised." All day long, all over the world, at all times, and in all places, the Lord is to be praised. The old orange juice commercial use to say, "It isn't just for breakfast anymore." We could say of praise, it isn't just for church services anymore. Praise is to be perpetual. It is a pleasure God wants you to enjoy all day long everyday.

Singing is the means by which love is most often expressed in the world. Take the theme of love and romance out of songs, and the air waves would be set back to an age of silence. Poetry and music combine to convey the joy of love. Singing is also the way the bride of Christ conveys her love to her Groom, and to God the Father, who made it all possible for them to be united. The romantic and the religious have a great deal in common. The Song of Solomon makes this clear by being both a great romantic and religious song. The romantic and religious represent the two most intense emotional relationships of life. There is no other means available to express these emotions adequately but by songs. Love needs a song.

The singing we do in church is not just to take up time to get an hour's service in. It is a basic part of our worship. We have the choir and soloist sing, and we sing as a congregation. That is three forms of singing that we do on a regular basis. Why do we devote so much time to songs? The reason is simple. If praise is the essence of worship, then the most likely way to touch our emotions and move us to praise God will be through the power of music. We need to listen to music with an ear that is determined to hear that which will provoke us to praise God. Is the tune enjoyable? Is the message

wonderful? Is the harmony pleasing? By one aspect or another I should be moved to praise God. That is the bottom line for all the music and songs that we hear in church.

The sacrifice of praise is not always easy to offer. It takes work and concentration. It takes a labor of love to get the mind trained to fulfill this duty. Every worship service is a training session to help the believer function more effectively in offering the sacrifice of praise. Our minds should be searching the words of the hymns, and asking the Lord to reveal how the message is of value to our lives. Paul says in I Cor. 14:15, "I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind." Yes, it is an expression of emotion to sing, but the mind is to be active as well as it searches to love God with all its being by finding exciting truths that lead you to praise.

Singing is not merely a preliminary to hearing the Word of God. It is preparation, but it has value in itself. First of all, it honors God. Psa. 50:23 says, "He who offers praise honors me." If you write a song or sing a song to someone, that is quite an honor, for it represents labor and sacrifice for the object of your praise. Secondly, it gives pleasure to the praiser. Psa. 147:1 says, "How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise Him." When we praise God we are giving to Him the only thing we really have to give. Worship involves not just what we get out of it, but what we put into it. What do you contribute to worship. Praise is to be your offering to God. To give praise gives pleasure to you in return, for it is a pleasure to give pleasure to one who gives you pleasure.

This is the goal of worship. Every time we come to an end of a service there should have been in that experience that which pleased God, and gave the worshipers pleasure. The most likely way that will happen will be by some truth or some music that will produce in the

worshippers the pleasure of praise.

7. A PRAYER OF PRAISE Based on Dan. 2:19-23

The point of interest in this passage is not the fact that Daniel and his friends prayed. This is neither unusual nor surprising under the circumstances. Their lives were at stake unless they had a direct revelation from God. One would be shocked if they did anything else but pray. One does not need to be a unique person of prayer to cry out to God when the danger is great. Even unbelievers pray when they face grave danger. The text, therefore, does not even give us the prayer he offered for help. It gives us the response he made in prayer after God granted the help by revealing to him the dream and its meaning.

When he prayed for help his prayer was a solemn matter of petition, and his heart would be heavy. He would be on his knees, or flat on his face earnestly pleading for God's mercy. But in this response we see a totally different aspect of prayer. It is a matter of praise, and his heart would be light, and his body so filled with grateful joy that it is likely he would be standing or walking with eyes uplifted to heaven. The posture of prayer and the nature of prayer varies with the circumstances. There is no best way, for it is such a personal matter of one's own relationship to God that the best is relative to the individual. Two Christians going to prayer may be very different, and one may desire to fall on his knees before God while the other wishes to stand. Daniel goes through both of these in one night, and it is his shout of praise that is recorded.

Richard Llewellyn in *How Green Was My Valley* has this conversation. Mr. Gruffydd, a minister, tells a boy to keep his spirit

clean, and the boy responds, "And how shall it be kept clean, Mr. Gruffydd?" He said, "By prayer my son, not mumbling, or shouting, or wallowing like a hog in religious sentiments. Prayer is only another name for good, clear direct thinking. When you pray, think well what you are saying, and make your thoughts into things that are solid. In that manner, your prayer will have strength, and that strength shall become a part of you, mind, body and spirit. I think the author has gone to far here in ruling out sentiment and the role of emotion, but what he does say is good. It fits the character of the prayers of the Bible.

Some of our best thinking and theology, and practical guidance for life comes from the prayers of the Bible. Daniel's prayer of praise is a prayer of solid things and clear thinking. We want to examine it from the point of view of what it teaches us about God. The first thing this prayer of praise teaches us is that-

I. GOD IS WORTHY OF PRAISE.

Someone has said, "There is something sweeter than receiving praise, the feeling of having deserved it." God alone is always deserving of praise, and that is why Jesus begins the Lord's Prayer with the adoration, "Hallowed be thy name." Daniel also begins with adoration: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever." Adoration of God is the highest attitude one can have in His presence. Someone has written, "In adoration the soul comes to God sensible of His love, majesty, holiness, and infinite greatness; feeling, and seeking more fully to feel the awe, reverence, and holy affection due to His great name; it transcends admiration and wonder; it is a blending of love with the fervent desire that all the world should know and magnify the glory of the Lord."

Our praise and adoration cannot exalt God objectively for He is

already the highest and ultimate in majesty, but it does exalt Him subjectively by placing God in His rightful place in our lives and thinking, and that is right at the top if first place. And attitude of adoration and praise is essential if we are to have an adequate concept of, and relationship to God. God alone is worthy of the very highest of our emotional responses, and if He does not receive them then we are lacking an allegiance to Him. Or if someone else or something else receives them we are idolaters.

The occupation of heaven is praise someone said, and this is because those who are there are fully aware of the majesty of their Maker. On earth we often slip into an unawareness of the greatness of the God who loves and saves us. Because of this it is important that praise be a part of our prayer life, for praise tends to keep us conscious of our smallness and God's greatness. In petition and intercession we are usually focusing on self and others and human needs, but when we praise we are caught up to heaven to focus on God and his all-sufficiency for every need. In praise we focus on the Giver and not just the gift.

God does not need the creatures praise for he is self-sufficient, but the creature needs to praise the Creator to keep himself conscious that he is not self-sufficient but dependent upon the grace and mercy of the Creator. Praise is a benefit to man for both now and in preparation for eternity. Andrew Melville said, "Praise is the best auxiliary to prayer. He who most bears in mind what has been done for him by God will be most emboldened to ask for fresh gifts from above." To neglect praise does not injure God, but it injures your own soul and cuts your blessings in half because you lose the joy that comes with praise. Thomas Chalmers said, "One of the most essential preparations for eternity is delight in praising God." Man will be at his highest when his whole being expresses adoration for God. Faber looked into eternity and sang-

**Father of Jesus, love's Reward!
What rapture will it be,
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze and gaze on Thee!**

The twenty four elders that John saw falling down before the throne of God were singing and this was their song in Rev. 4:11: "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power..." We praise God because he is worthy of our praise. Daniel in lifting his voice in praise to God makes it clear where his ultimate loyalty is placed. God is indeed his God, and he longs for his name to be blessed forever and ever. The second thing this praise prayer teaches us about God is-

II. THE ATTRIBUTES THAT MAKE HIM WORTHY OF PRAISE.

The two that impress Daniel at this point are God's wisdom and might. These are called His omniscience and omnipotence. He is all knowing and all powerful. Daniel is praising God for showing these attributes in his own life. In verse 23 he says he thanks and praises God forgiving him wisdom and strength. All the wisdom and power we have comes from God, who is the source of all wisdom and power.

Daniel is especially conscious of this, for let us remember, at the time that he is praying he has had a full revelation of the king's dream. He knows what history is going to bring forth in the future. He knows there will be many changes, and kings will rise and fall. This is what he is speaking of in verses 21 and 22. In verse 20 he names the two attributes, and then in 21 and 22 he spells out how they effect history. The first he explains is God's might. He changes time and seasons, and he removes kings and sets them up. Changing times are not mere accidents. They are a part of God's plan. Behind progress is a planner with a goal. God works in history through

changes. We need to be among the optimists who believe that God is working even in the rapid changes of our time. It is easy to talk about God as a sovereign and powerful God of history, and then turn around and talk as if history was in the hands of men or Satan.

William James visited Thomas Carlyle in 1856 and afterward wrote this to a friend: "Carlyle, the same old sausage frizzling and sputtering in his own grease, only infinitely more unreconciled to the blessed Providence which guides human affairs. He names God frequently and alludes to the highest things as if they were realities, but it almost looks as if he did it only for a picturesque effect, so completely does he seem to regard them as habitually circumvented and set at naught by politicians." His belief in a sovereign God was only theoretical but not practical. He never carried the doctrine into reality, but kept it strictly in the realm of words.

I fear that Carlyle is not an isolated example, and that all of us tend to fall into this trap of keeping belief and action in water tight compartments. The Greek word for believe is so much a matter of action that there is an actual record of a farmer who believed his seed to the ground, he committed it and trusted it to the ground. He bet his life on the fact that it would grow. Christian belief has got to be practical, or it is powerless. To believe seed will grow and never to act on it by planting the seed is not faith, but it is folly. So also to believe in a God of history who is sovereign, and yet to talk of only the despair and act as if it was only a meaningless mess is to deny in action what you profess in words.

Like Daniel we must not only say it, but live as if we really believed in God's power. We need to understand that being all powerful does not mean that he can do anything. Thomas Aquinas said, "Omnipotence is the power to do whatever does not involve a contradiction." This means that there is much in history that is not

God's will, for He cannot let man be a free agent, and then make sure he does not use his freedom to do anything contrary to God's will. Evil will have consequences that are not God's will, but evil can only postpone God's plan. It cannot stop it, and so the Christian can always be hopeful, and they can always praise God because he will accomplish his purpose.

Daniel is greatly impressed also with the omniscience of God. He has all wisdom. There is no mystery so deep, or no question so dark that his light cannot penetrate it and make it clear. Daniel has just had it revealed to him concerning the great empires that will follow the Babylonian Empire, and he marvels at God's knowing the end from the beginning. Some poet has written,

**Eternity with all its years,
Stands present in Thy view;
To Thee there's nothing old appears,
Great God, there's nothing new.**

James says that if we lack wisdom we need to ask God, for He is the source of all wisdom. Daniel is praising God for the wisdom He is giving to him, and we are all wiser if we will follow his example and constantly praise God in prayer.

8. THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE Based on Heb. 13:15-21

In the middle 1800's Henry Comstock staked his claim and dug until he found gold. He was getting some, but knew there had to be more. He was convinced there was a mother load there somewhere, and he kept digging. Weeks turned to months, and months to years,

and finally he gave up in 1859 when he was offered \$11,000 for his claim. The new owner dug just a few feet deeper and struck that mother load. The Comstock mine produced 340 million in gold.

So often in life we stop digging too soon, and miss the mother load of blessings God has for us. That is why Paul wrote in Gal. 6:9, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." After Christmas is over it is easy to give up the Christmas spirit, and put wonder and praise on the back burner for another year. When we stop digging for the wonder that makes us worship, and the presents that makes us praise, we stop short of the mother load, and fail to get all the gold God wants to give us.

Mary Lacy in her book A Woman Wants God tells of asking her new neighbor if they were going to her mother's home for Christmas. "Oh, no," she said, "My husband has to work on Christmas day, so we will stay right here." "But doesn't that nylon plant close down even for Christmas," she asked. "No, they can't," her neighbor replied. "Once the flow of liquid nylon begins to move through the large pipes it would be disaster to stop it. It would cool and harden, clogging and ruining the machinery. They must keep the nylon flowing even on Christmas day, for it is a continuous process."

That is also the description of Christian praise. It is not something you can shut down, for it is also a continuous process. It, of course, does not stop for Christmas, but it is to be a continuous process that does not stop for non-holidays and week days either. We have a tendency to stop and give up praising God, and thereby robbing ourselves of the mother load of blessings God has for those who learn that praise is a continuous process. The main reason we stop short is because we never really grasp the Biblical teaching that every

believer is a priest whose job it is to continually offer a sacrifice of praise. This text in Heb. 13:15 that tells us this, is in direct opposition to the common concepts that only a special class of people can be priests, and that sacrifice is no longer necessary, and that praise should be limited to certain days and places. Hidden within this verse is a mother load of golden truth that can make each of us rich if we are willing to keep digging until we strike it.

I am convinced that the key to a happy New Year, and the key to a happy new forever lies in our digging out of this verse all that it contains. This verse is a shaft to a mine that runs all through the Bible, and as we dig deeper and deeper I can assure you that if you hold on to what we dig up you'll be rich in the way God wants you to be rich in the days ahead. This verse opens up many veins of treasure concerning praise. We see here:

THE PATHWAY TO PRAISE-through Jesus.

THE PRIESTS OF PRAISE-let us.

THE PERSON OF PRAISE-God.

THE PERPETUALNESS OF PRAISE-continually.

THE PRICE OF PRAISE-offer a sacrifice.

THE PURPOSE OF PRAISE-confess His name and please God.

These and many other aspects of this subject will be our focus in the coming weeks. Since it is a subject that most of us have not studied in any depth, we are going to start our exploration of this gold mine of Biblical truth by focusing on our duty as Christians to be perpetually offering to God the sacrifice of praise. Therefore, the first shaft we will descend will be called-

I. THE PRIESTHOOD OF PRAISE.

Martin Luther brought it to life; the Baptist picked it up as one of

their foundation principles, and most other denominations acknowledge it as a basic Biblical truth. It is the priesthood of all believers. The Old Testament system of priests and sacrifices has been made obsolete. Sacrifice was done away with by the once for all sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The idea of a special class of people who alone could intercede and offer sacrifice is eliminated, for the curtain in the temple was rent from top to bottom, when Jesus died on the cross, allowing all to come into the presence of God. There is neither male or female, Jew nor Gentile in Christ, for all are equally free to come into the very holy of holies to offer to God the sacrifice of praise.

No longer is there a Gentile part of the temple. No longer is there a female area beyond which women could not go. No longer is there a division of lay people and clergy where the clergy could go into the presence of God, but not the lay people. All of the old system is changed, and now, in Christ, all believers are equal, and have full access to the presence of God. Freedom of worship is what Jesus made universal by His sacrifice. Now all Christians have the right and the privilege of offering to God the sacrifice of praise.

The primary purpose of our existence is to be people of praise, and to do those things in life that produce praise to God. That is the whole point of God giving man gifts. Every gift we have has one goal, and that is to produce praise. The purpose of all creativity is to produce praise. The beauty of music, art, literature, science, and all of life is to lead us and others to praise God. Thank God for all which kindles love and appreciation for the Author of life.

Why do you think Paul wrote in Phil. 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things." It is because Paul

knows the very essence of life is in praising God, and the more you focus on the things to praise God for the more you will fulfill your purpose for being. Praise is no sideline. It is the job of the believer. It is the duty of the priests to offer praise perpetually, and this can be hard to do if you take your eyes off the lovely and praiseworthy, and begin to focus on the evil and ugliness of a fallen world. You cannot escape this reality, and neither could Paul, but your job as a priest is to always look beyond it to that which leads to praise.

George Herbert wrote, "Of all thy creatures both in sea and land only to man thou hast made known thy ways and put the penne alone into His hand and made Him secretarie to thy praise." As secretary of praise it is our job description to take notes of all there is to offer praise to God about, and encourage others to do the same, and live a life of praise without ceasing. The point we need to grasp is that this duty of praising God perpetually is the duty of every Christian. It is not a specialized task like teaching or preaching, or playing an instrument. All of the gifts of the Spirit, and all talents are specialized ministries which are limited to those who have the gifts and talents. The members of the body who do not have these things cannot perform the tasks of those who do. The eye cannot hear, and the ear cannot see. The hand cannot smell, and the nose cannot lift, and on and on we can see the many things that are specialized tasks for people who can do them.

Offering the sacrifice of praise is not one of these specialized tasks. It is the duty of every believer because every believer is a priest, and every believer has a duty to offer sacrifice, and the only acceptable sacrifice is the sacrifice of lip and life, which is praise to God. This is what all parts of the body have in common. It is the basis for unity. Gifts give us variety in the body, and praise gives us unity. Since many of you may not have known that you were priests, because you do not recall your ordination into priesthood, it will be our first

task to help you see that this is your vocation in the body of Christ. The more you see who you are as a priest who leads worship in the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is your own body and life, the more you will be a true worshiper in spirit and in truth, which Jesus says, the Father is ever looking for.

Christian worship is not a matter of professionals doing something while the rest of the people watch. Christian worship is a matter of participation by every person in the congregation. We need to get the true picture that Kierkegaard gave of the church at worship. God is the audience; the congregation are the actors or worshipers, and the pastor, song leader, organist, pianist, and choir, are the promoters whose job it is to motivate you to praise God. The leaders of worship are to be aids to your worship. You hear a song and you praise God for its beauty and its truth. You hear an insight into God's revelation, and you thank God for it and praise Him for His Word. The essence of all we do as leaders is to get you, the worshiper, to praise God, for that is your job as priests. If you do not praise God, you have failed to worship, for that is the essence of worship.

If we learn this, every service will become more meaningful, for you will not just be passive spectators, but active participators in worship. If the promoters are so poor that nothing they do or say motivates you to praise God, then do it on your own. Think on those things that move you to praise God, for just because someone else does not do their job does not mean you have no obligation to do yours. Your job is to continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.

Now, lest you think this is an isolated verse, let me share with you that this is the clear teaching of Peter the leader of the 12 Apostles. If anyone would want to suppress the idea of the priesthood of all believers, and keep this job in the hands of the professionals, it would

be Peter. But Peter throws the door open to all in

I Pet. 2:9. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Peter belonged to the most exclusive Christian group ever to exist-the 12 Apostles. But he knew that the 12 had no corner on the priesthood. This was the office of all Christians, and all are called to the ministry of praise. You can lack the gifts you wish you had, and feel inferior and inadequate in many ways, but you are a part of the royal priesthood if you are a believer in Christ, and you have the duty of offering the sacrifice of praise; not once a year, or once a month, or once a week, but continually. The temple of praise is never closed.

As American Christians we pick up the values and practices of our culture. Being a mere spectator is a major part of our culture. Ride the bus and leave the driving to us, or we do it all for you, as the ad says. We bring this attitude to church, and expect others to do our job for us, but it doesn't work that way. I can only praise God for myself. I cannot give God your sacrifice of praise. The choir can only praise God for themselves. They cannot do it for you. Every Christian has to offer their own sacrifice of praise, and this is good, for when they do they become a part of true worship. This is the goal of God, and so everywhere we see the idea of the priesthood of all believers, we see the act of praise. Priesthood and praise are linked, for that is the primary task of New Testament priesthood.

In Rev. 1:5-6 we read, "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve His God and Father-to Him be glory and power forever and ever." Praise God that we are all called to be priests who praise God. It is our purpose as the people of God to offer perpetual praise. But since we have not paid close attention to this, we can go through a service and never think of it. We have much to praise God

for, but we are not conscious that it is our duty. We have stopped short, and the mother load is left just a few feet away, and we rob ourselves of the riches that come with doing our duty.

This vein of golden truth was buried for centuries. The clergy took over the whole process of worship, and the laity was shut out. Only the priest could offer sacrifice and give holy communion, and only they could baptize. The church forgot grace and fell back under the law of Moses. It began to function much like the Old Testament system of temple worship. Jesus destroyed the temple and raised up his own body as the temple, but the church raised up the old temple again, and for centuries Christianity was made a modified form of legalistic and ritualistic Judaism. It was the same system where Jesus himself did not qualify to be a priest, let alone the high priest.

In 1520 Martin Luther began the reformation, and one of the key truths that he revived from the New Testament was the truth of the priesthood of all believers. He wrote, "Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in Him, to be not only his brethern, co-heirs, and fellow kings, but also his fellow-priests. Therefore we may come boldly into the presence of God in the spirit of faith and cry "abba Father." Pray for one another, and do all things which we see done and foreshadowed in the outer and visible works of priests."

The basis for women being deacons and serving communion is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. There is nothing any layperson cannot do that the priests of the Old Testament did as an exclusive body of people, for now Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, male and female, are all priests of God. To deny this you have to rewrite the New Testament. Jesus did not qualify to be a priest under the Old Testament, but now He is the High Priest over the people of God. None of us qualify to be priests under the Old Testament, but now under our High Priest, we all qualify just by being a part of His

Kingdom.

We no longer offer blood sacrifices, for Jesus eliminated that by His own sacrifice. Now we offer spiritual sacrifices. In I Pet. 2:5 Peter writes, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ." How often do we come to church and do not recognize that we come as priests to offer the sacrifice of praise? I have never asked anyone if they wanted to be a priest, but I have asked many if they want to become a Christian by faith in Christ. I just never stopped to think of it, but when you ask the one you are also asking the other, for as soon as you become a child of God you are a priest of God. It is the priesthood of all believers, and not just of some, or of more mature believers. All believers are a part of the priesthood. As soon as you believe in Christ you are on duty, and responsible for offering the sacrifice of praise. Praise is the universal gift of all God's people.

A believer who does not praise God is like a doctor who does not give medicine; a teacher who does not give knowledge; a pilot who does not fly. A priest must praise for that is the very purpose of his being a priest. Even the believing children are priests. Psa. 8:2 says, "From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise." When children sing Jesus loves me this I know, or any other song of recognition of Christ, they are fulfilling their duty as priests of the Lord most high. There are no exceptions. There are no children of God who are exempt from this duty of praise. It is absolute and universal-let all who have breath praise the Lord.

If the choir has sung beautifully and we have not praised God, we have not worshiped. If the soloist does a marvelous job, but the rest of us have not praised God, we have not worshiped. If the pastor preaches a wonderful message, but we have not praised God it is

mere noise, and we have not worshiped. That which makes all that we do be true worship is the sacrifice of praise. Only when the whole priesthood offers the sacrifice of praise have we worshiped in a God-pleasing and Christ-honoring way. This means we can not longer come to church as mere spectators expecting someone else to do the duty of worship for us. We must come with the expectation that we as priests will offer to God the sacrifice of praise.

9. PERSISTENCE IN PRAISE Based on Heb. 13:15-21

Captain Eddy Richenbacker was in an airplane crash in Atlanta and was rushed to the hospital. He was going in and out of consciousness. It was thought that he would not survive. The most famous radio commentator in the U.S. then was the late Walter Winchell. He said in his broadcast, "Friends, pray for Eddy Richenbacker. He is dying in an Atlanta hospital. He is not expected to live out the night." Richenbacker was listening to that broadcast, and when he heard this he took a jug of water and threw it at the radio knocking it across the room. He said, "I'm not going to die. I'm not going to give up." Here was a man who survived many trials because he never gave up. When he received the Horatio Alger Award, which was given to outstanding American men who fought their way from poverty to success, he said, "My mother, a very poor woman in Columbus, Ohio, taught her kids to pray, read the Bible, to follow Jesus Christ and never to give up."

In the literature of success the theme you will confront most often is the theme of persistence. The athlete who didn't have a chance, but who by perseverance and persistence became the best. The Bible is

loaded with this theme as well, and one I never saw before is the persistence of Lot. Two angels came to Sodom, and Lot seeing they were strangers invited them to come to his house and spend the night. Their response to his hospitality was very definite. We read in Gen. 19:2, "No, they answered, we will spend the night in the square." Lot did not know he was arguing with angels or he might have weakened, but he did not take no for an answer. Verse 3 says, "But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house." His persistence in showing hospitality led to his being saved from the destruction of the city. We could go on and on with illustrations of how persistence is the key factor in every form of success.

Never give up, for the wisest is boldest,
Knowing that Providence mingles the cup;
And of all maxims, the best, as the oldest,
Is the stern watchward of 'Never give up!'
Holmes

This morning we want to pursue this theme as it applies to our duty as priests in offering to God the sacrifice of praise. One of the primary dangers with every new idea is the danger of faddishness. We jump on the current bandwagon of what is hot, and ride that until we tire of it, and then hop on the next fad express that tingles our fancy. It is a part of our culture, and Christians are as guilty of it as anyone else. The church is constantly following fads and promoting some theme as the greatest idea since sliced bread, and then a few months after it is passe and nobody even remembers what it was, for we have moved on to a whole new world of posters, flyers, and promotional gimmick for a new idea.

There is a risk that we will treat praise like this and go through a phase of praise thinking, and then move on to something else and leave praise behind. It is my prayer that we will not treat praise as a fad,

but recognize that the Scripture demands that it become a perpetual part of our lives. We are to never give up, but be persistent in praise all of our days, and then on into eternity. To promote this kind of persistence we want to focus our attention on the word in our text-continually. "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise." The Greek word is *diapantos*, which is used 7 other times in the New Testament. It is used in the very last verse of Luke: "And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God."

We know the Apostles did not live 24 hours a day at the temple praising God. The point is, it was their regular pattern of life. They did not just stop in on the day of atonement to praise God. They did it persistently, and so for us also, praise is not to be a periodic function of the priesthood of all believers. It is to be the regular and perpetual duty we are to never forsake. In Heb. 9:6 the word is used again to describe the duties of the Old Testament priesthood. "When everything had been arranged like this, the priests entered regularly into the outer room to carry on their ministry." The word regularly is the same word as continually. Just as the Old Testament priests had a ministry that did not cease, so the New Testament priesthood has such a ministry-the ministry of persistence praise. We tend to have regular times of prayer, but neglect to develop regular times of praise.

If someone asked you if you are in the ministry you would not doubt be honest and say no. But in your supposed honesty you would, in fact, be lying, for if you are a believer you are in a ministry that never ceases, and it is this ministry of praise. You can get out of the ministry of preaching, teaching, counseling, and visitation. You can quit or retire or get too sick or die, and thus, end your ministry, but there is no way out of the ministry of praise. In Psa. 146:2 we read, "I will praise the Lord all my life, I will sing praise to my God as long as I live." That sounds like there is an end, and at death you can give up

this ministry, but not so, for in Psa. 145:1 he has already said, "I will praise your name for ever and ever." The only way out of this ministry is by neglect and disobedience. As long as we walk in obedience we are in the ministry where we are obligated to offer persistently the sacrifice of praise.

What this means is that praise is the link that connects all of life into a unity. For the praising Christians there is no distinction between the sacred and the secular. The whole of creation, and the whole of life, is full of things for which we are to praise to God. Praise is not a Sunday thing, but as Psa. 145:2 says, "Everyday I will praise you." It is a Sunday through Saturday thing. It is a perpetual ministry with no days off. The Psalms tell us we are to look at all of nature, and all of history, and see the providential hand of God in His creative wisdom and praise Him ceaselessly.

If you just tell yourself it is your ministry to praise God, and begin to look for reasons to do so, you will find them by numbers too great to calculate. I got up one morning and began to praise God for my life, wife, bed, clothes, the parsonage and all who helped build it for the warmth of the heat, for the sink and water, mirror, towels, all the people I love, and I had a good long list of comforts and pleasures of life to praise God for even before I got to the breakfast table. I was overwhelmed when I realized there are hundreds of things we take for granted and neglect to praise God for.

We think of sacrifice as something we have to give up, and this can be the case, but if you look up the word sacrifice, you discover it also can simply mean the offering of something to God. It is your gift to God, and it does not mean you have to suffer loss to offer this sacrifice. In fact, in offering praise to God you actually gain, for there is power in praise to heal, restore, and benefit the one who offers it in many ways. You gain rather than give up when you offer the sacrifice

of praise. It is important that we grasp this or we will have a problem that will make praise a legalistic work rather than a response of love.

C. S. Lewis, as a new Christian, was offended by the idea that God was like a dictator, celebrity, or millionaire who demanded that people tell them how wonderful they are. We are all offended at the vain person who is ever fishing for compliments to reassure them of their self-worth. Is this the kind of God we worship? Is He one who needs men to be ever praising Him to feel good about Himself? This is absurd, for God is self-sufficient and needs nothing to be content. He demands praise, and is pleased with it for the same reason we want our children to learn to be polite and thoughtful. It makes them better and more pleasant people who will be liked and loved. God wants us to learn to praise Him perpetually, for the praisers will be the most effective and most loved children.

The Christian who sees the most in life to praise God for is the Christian who will most fulfill his highest purpose, which is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The more you praise God, the more you enjoy Him. The more you praise God for His creation, the more you enjoy His creation. The more you praise God for His Word, the more you will enjoy the Word.

Your own happiness is in direct proportion to your persistence in praise. God does not need your praise for His happiness. You need to praise Him for your happiness. When C. S. Lewis discovered this, he wrote in his book *Reflection On The Psalms*, "I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious, minds, praised most, while the cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least. The good critics found something to praise in many imperfect works; the bad ones continually narrowed the list of books we might be allowed to read. The healthy and unaffected man, even is luxuriously brought up and widely experienced in good cookery, could

praise a very modest meal: The dyspeptic and the snob found fault with all. Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible."

In a sentence: The healthiest Christians are the Christians who praise God persistently. God invites us to praise Him, not for His need, but for ours. When we praise God and enjoy Him, we find the highest happiness we are capable of experiencing. This is the paradox of the sacrifice of praise. We offer it up to God, but it is we who get the most benefit. The Old Testament sacrifice illustrates this. When an ox or a lamb was offered to God, the parts that could be eaten were grilled and then eaten by the priests, and on special occasions by the people offering the sacrifice. God did not need the meat, but man did. The sacrifice to God was enjoyed by the sacrificers. They feasted on what they offered to God, and so it is with the sacrifice of praise. It is the offerer of praise who most benefits by this grateful spirit. God is pleased just as you are when your child learns to say thank you, but your pleasure is not so much that you needed the encouragement, but because it pleases you to have your child becoming a grateful person. Praise is good news to God, for He knows thereby that the praiser is becoming a better and happier child of God.

The more persistent we are in our praise of God the more we are becoming what He wants us to be. All happiness is some form of preoccupation. When we are preoccupied with something beyond ourselves, and are not thinking about ourselves, we are happiest. That is why hobbies and sports are so popular. They enable us to get beyond ourselves, and this is the best thing for the self. Self-forgetful devotion to something beyond the self is the key to happiness. That is why praise is the key to the highest happiness, for it is devotion to the highest. Glory to God in the highest, sang the angels, and we can know they were happy angels, for they were preoccupied with God and not focused on their own glory.

If the angels would cease to praise, they would cease to be happy, and that is why heaven is always shown to be a place of perpetual praise. Luther said that hell is hell because there is no praise there, and heaven is heaven because the praise of God is always there. Psa. 84:4 says, "Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you." The nearest we can get to heaven on earth is perpetual praise. Spurgeon preached a marvelous sermon on Psa. 145:2 which says, "Everyday I will praise you." Listen to a portion of that message:

"Each day has its mercy, and should render its praise. When Monday is over, you will have something to praise God for on Tuesday. He that watches for God's hand will never belong without seeing it. If you will only spy out God's mercies, with half an eye you will see them every day of the year. Fresh are the dews of each morning, and equally fresh are its blessings. "Fresh trouble," says one. Praise God for the trouble, for it is a richer form of blessing. "Fresh care," says one. Cast all your care on Him who careth for you, and that act will in itself bless you. "Fresh labor," says another. Yes, but fresh strength, too.

There is never a night but what there comes a day after it: never an affliction without its consolation. Every day you must utter the memory of His great goodness.

If we cannot praise God on any one day for what we have had that day, let us praise Him for it tomorrow. "It is better on before." Let us learn that quaint verse:-

**And a new song is in my mouth,
To long-lived music set:-
Glory to thee for all the grace
I have not tasted yet.**

Let us forestall our future, and draw upon the promises. What if today I am down; tomorrow I shall be up! What if today I cast ashes on my head: Tomorrow the Lord shall crown me with loving-kindness! What if today my pains trouble me, they will soon be gone! It will be all the same a hundred years hence, at any rate; and so let me praise God for what is within measurable distance. In a few years I shall be with the angels, and be with my Lord Himself. Blessed be His name! Begin to enjoy your heaven now."

There is much of heaven we can enjoy now, but that part of it we can enjoy now is praise. Praise brings us into the presence of God. The more we praise, the more we live in His presence, and thus, the more experience His guidance. This is a strong conviction of the Jews. Mark Van Doren and Maurice Samuel, two outstanding Jewish authors of our day, tell us that the book of Psalms, even though it is the longest book of the Bible, is taken every day to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, and two groups of Jews chat it from beginning to end. These songs of praise to God are offered up every day in perpetual praise. How much more should we as Christians praise God every day who already have God's promise to Israel fulfilled in our Savior?

The Hebrew name of the Psalms is The Book Of Praises. They are the main source of praise in Israel and the church. If they are taken seriously we see that praise is no part time job. It is the duty of a believer to offer praise to God daily and perpetually while there is any breath in him. In some old monasteries the monks would take turns before the alter repeating the Psalms every moment of the 24 hours in a day. The problem with this, and the Jewish groups doing the same thing, is that it is mechanical, legelistic, and sounds more like a work of merit rather than a response of love to God.

I can not speak for God, but I know from my own point of view, I

love to see the grandchildren spontaneously express their love and excitement to me in my presence. I can not imagine being as pleased if they came to the house and read a prepared text. If God could really be pleased with a mere mechanical reading of the Psalms, we could all read them into a recorded, and let the recorded play every day, and thereby fulfill our priestly duty of daily offering the sacrifice of praise. The Pharisees would have loved it, but I doubt that God would be impressed.

God delights in the same thing we all delight in. We love to be appreciated. God is no super-egoist who gets a kick out of man's mechanical praise. He gets His kicks the same way we do; out of our children and grandchildren sincerely expressing appreciation. I am not opposed when Cindy will say to the grand kids, "Now say thank you to grandpa." But this does not compare to the pleasure of their coming on their own to express thanks. We are made in the image of God, and we can assume that God likes His praise this way as well. He wants it free and meaningful, and not forced and mechanical, because His children really are thankful and want to express it.

Praise balances out prayer. Prayer is primarily asking. Praise is primarily giving. We tend to spend most of our conversation with God in asking, and very little in praising God for His blessings. Children do the same to their parents and grandparents. We expect it, and do not do a lot to help children balance out their requests with responses of gratitude. The result is that children grow up always wanting from parents, and not a lot concerned about giving to parents. Christians have the same relationship to God by and large. I am sure I have spent the greatest portion of my prayer time asking, and only a fraction of it in giving God praise. I suspect I am not unusual. One of my goals is to balance that out with a higher percentage of praise.

The paradox is that Jesus eliminated sacrifice, and at the same time

elevated sacrifice to a full time job for the believer. The sacrifice of praise is to be offered continually. This could be seen as a negative, as if Jesus was demanding too much, almost life slave labor, and to be ever at it in praising. But we need to see praise, not as labor but as an expression of love. Praise is the way we enjoy God, and this makes all of life more enjoyable. Spurgeon recommended that we do more singing. He says that as priests we have a duty to sing as much as possible. We should encourage singing at the table. Jesus and His disciples sang at the Last Supper. It is good for digestion, and family joy, and it pleases God. Look for times when the family can sing together more often. As priests we are never off duty, and so praising God is not to be limited to our church experience. The job of praising God, if we take it seriously, and do it perpetually, will eliminate most of the complaining, gripping, and conflict that damages the family and the church.

Persistent praise means one has to have a positive perspective on life where they see the good, the true, the beautiful, even when life is not conspicuously full of these things, but just the opposite. One of the most optimistic minds I have ever read about was that of the little boy who got a new bat and ball for his birthday. "He was so eager to try it out that he pestered his dad to take him to the park. Finally, the father gave in. When they got there, the kid said, "Watch this, dad." He tossed the ball up in the air, swung at it real hard with the bat and missed. He picked the ball up again, and said, "Watch, dad." He tossed it up, swung and missed again.

This went on and on many more times, but each time the kid was just as enthused when he hollered "Watch this one, dad." Finally, the kid picked the bat and ball up, walked over to his father and said, "What do you think, dad. Have you ever seen such great pitching?"

The ability to see a good side to all of life is based on belief that God means what he says, and will work in all things for good with

those who love Him, and that He will keep all His promises to be with us forever.

**I stand in the great forever,
I lave in the ocean of truth,
And I bask in the golden sunshine
Of endless love and youth.
And God is within and around me,
All good is forever mine,
To all who seek it is given,
And it comes by a law divine.
Thus I stand in the great forever
With Thee as eternities roll;
Thy Spirit forsakes me never,
Thy love is the home of my soul.**

The more persistent we are in praise, the more we produce a heavenly environment in time. The more we neglect and forget praise, the more we produce the environment of hell. It is not how good life is, nor how much of the grace of God you have experienced, that is the measure of your spiritual success, but, rather, the degree to which you have been persistent in praise.

Remember the ten lepers? They all experienced a miracle of healing grace, but only one experienced the giving back to Christ the sacrifice of praise. It may have cost him time and inconvenience, but listen to this poem that describes the remorse of one who did not go back.

**I meant to go back, but you may guess
I will filled with amazement I cannot express.
To think that after those horrible years,
That terrible loathing and passion of fears,
Of sores unendurable-eaten, defiled-
My flesh was then smooth as the flesh of a child.**

**I was drunken with joy; I was crazy with glee-
I scarcely could walk and I could scarcely see,
For the dazzle of sunshine where all had been black;
But I meant to go back, Oh, I meant to go back!
I had thought to return, then my people came out,
There were tears of rejoicing and laughter and shout;
My cup was so full I seemed nothing to lack-
But I meant to go back; Oh, I meant to go back.**

-Anonymous

Your praise is the only wealth you have that is acceptable currency in heaven. By means of it you can please God, and actually repay Him in a minimal way for His goodness to you. Psa, 116:12 asks the question, "How can I repay the Lord for all His goodness to me?" In verse 17 we see His answer: "I will sacrifice a thank offering to you." Thanking and praising God is like paying off the mortgage on your heavenly home. Gold and jewels are no big deal in heaven, but praise is priceless and will go on forever.

Kenneth Osbeck, a leading authority on church music, and author of 9 books on church music, tells of how his father always sang as he did his job. He was a painter, and his customers called him "The singing painter." At his funeral many of his customers told of the positive impact his cheerful attitude had on them as he painted. He was offering the sacrifice of praise continually. We cannot all do that, and singing on our job could be a great annoyance rather than blessing. The point is, the Christian is to never cease to seek for ways to make his life a life of praise, for this is our calling, to be persistent in praise for all of our days.

C. S. Lewis wrote, "We-or at least I-shall not be able to adore God on the highest occasions if we have learned no habit of doing so on the lowest. At best, our faith and reason will tell us that He is adorable,

but we shall not have found Him so, not have "tasted and seen." Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy. These pure and spontaneous pleasures are "patches of Godlight" in the woods of our experience." If you want a happy New Year, and a year of Christian growth, and a year of better spiritual health, the way to these goals is to offer the sacrifice of praise continually, and be persistent in praise.

10. THE PRAISE OF LAUGHTER Based on Psa. 126:1-6

Have you ever praised God for the enjoyment of laughter? Some of the greatest of God's people have. When Theodore Cuyler, the American preacher, visited the great London preacher, Charles Spurgeon, they told each other the crazy things that happened in their respective ministries. They enjoyed their laughter as they walked in the woods, and they were about exhausted after so many amusing stories. Spurgeon said, "Let's kneel down and praise God for laughter." So these two great men of God knelt together and thanked God for this gift.

If we are to love God with our whole being, then it follows that we are love God even with our laughter. They were praising God for the gift of laughter. In Psa. 126 we see God's people praising Him with the gift of laughter. The Israelites were so filled with the delight that they were no longer captives, but free citizens back in their home land. They laughed out loud with joy. It would be hard to laugh and sing at the same time, but verse 2 puts them together, and their mouth is filled with laughter, and their tongues with songs of joy. Maybe they

would tell stories of their joyful return, and then laugh together, and break into songs of praise for God's providential guidance in their lives. All we know is they were a happy people, and their laughter was a part of their praise to God. Laughter is another aspect of the physiology of praise, for it is a bodily function whereby the heart and mind manifest their feelings and thoughts.

Dr. Paul Rees tells of the Christian businessman traveling to St. Louis who left his hotel on Sunday morning looking for a place to worship. He asked a policeman for direction to the nearest Protestant church. When he gave him the information he asked why he had recommended that particular church out of several possibilities. The policeman smiled and replied, "I'm not a church man myself, but the people who come out of that church are the happiest looking church people in St. Louis. I thought that would be the kind of church you would like to attend." Laughter and smiling make a statement to the world about the God we worship.

There is one well known pastor in a large church in California who always ends his sermon with a joke. It is so that people go out laughing. That can seem somewhat sacrilegious, and it can be inappropriate for some themes, but there is an escaping the truth that laughter is a powerful witness to the good things God has done for us. The nations round about Israel were impressed with their laughter and joy, and they had to confess that the Lord has done great things for them.

God is glorified among those outside His family when those inside are full of laughter and songs of joy. Praise like this is not just for their own self enjoyment. It is a powerful tool for evangelism, for people want to know a God who can bring joy and laughter into their lives. D. L. Moody said, "If Christians are gloomy and cast down, and not full of praise, the world will reject their Gospel. It is not good

news if it does not produce praise in those who have it. Praise, joy, and laughter are a big part of our witness to the world." A Lord who never gives laughter to His people is not appealing, but is appalling. He is seen more as a tyrant and task master rather than a loving heavenly Father who leads His family to enjoy the fun of life, and to laugh at the funnies of life.

There are serious times in life where laughter is inappropriate, but all too often Christians have assumed that worship is one of those times that must always be somber and solemn, and not a fun time. Time with our earthly father can be a time of rolling on the floor, tickling and telling jokes, and having a good time. But spending time with our heavenly Father is not to be fun, but only serious. It seems to be irreverent to laugh and carry on with hilarious songs of joy. Yet, these are the kinds of activities that we see in the worship songs in the Old Testament. You have to be childlike to enjoy this sort of thing, but we have grown out of that into sophisticated adults where solemnity is the only mood we feel is appropriate.

The paradox is that the people who have used the Psalms for their hymnal have been the most solemn of Christians. Ellen Glasgow in her autobiography tells of her father who was a Presbyterian elder who was full of rectitude and rigid with duty. She writes, "He was entirely unselfish, and in his long life he never committed a pleasure." Many godly Presbyterians, and other Puritan type Christians, were trained to avoid all smiling and signs of enjoyment in the house of God. Worship was serious business, and woe be the bottom of any child caught laughing.

The devil, no doubt, split a side laughing at his success in blinding Christians to the message of their own songs, which were inspired by God, and which indicated He gets the same pleasure out of His children laughing as we get out of ours. There are few things in life

cuter than a laughing child. We know God feels the same, and Bildad was right when he said to Job in Job 8:21, "He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy." Eccles. 10:19 says, "A feast is made for laughter..." You cannot have a feast without a lot of food, but if everybody just sits silently eating, it is still not a feast, for there has to be merriment in conversation, and jokes that lead to laughter to make it a feast.

The Bible links laughter to joy and to feasting, and these are both vast subjects in the Bible, making laughter a major aspect of the godly life. A study of all the Hebrew words dealing with laughter revealed 91 references to either mocking or merry laughter. It is a major part of life, and it is a major part of the biblical depiction of life. Let's keep in mind that laughter is not just a response to humor. It is also a response to pleasure. It may be physical pleasure, or the mental pleasure of good news, or the psychological pleasure of any positive exciting event. People don't just cry at weddings, they also laugh for joy. They laugh with pleasure when they see their team make a clever play and score. They laugh in endless ways at that which is pleasurable.

Amazement and wonder, which are so much a part of biblical worship, are also capable of producing laughter if we let ourselves express the pleasure in such wonder. It is not just the silly, but the sublime, that can lead to laughter. There are records of early Christians getting so excited about the truth of Easter that they laughed, and it became a common phrase to talk of Easter laughter. In the Greek Orthodox tradition the day after Easter was a time to gather and tell jokes and stories. Laughter was their way of celebrating the big joke God played on Satan. It was funny how God tricked Satan and conquered hell by means of death. Satan thought the cross was his victory, but it spelled his doom, and allowed Jesus to enter His kingdom and take the keys of death and hell from him. It

was the most serious business of all history, and yet it was the basis for laughter, because God used Satan's greatest evil to accomplish His own greatest good.

Abraham and Sarah were so amazed that they could have a child in their old age that they laughed. It was such a wonder that they named their baby Issac, which means laughter. It was funny for a 90 year old woman to have a baby. It was so unusual and odd that it produced both wonder and laughter. We had an experience like this once when our grandson Jason was about 10 months old. We had a dog named Cuddles who could leap into the air and catch a frizbee. When Jason saw that he burst into laughter that was so deep it came all the way from his toes. Lavonne and I exploded with laughter at his laughter, for we had never heard anything quite like it. We kept at it until we were exhausted. It was the perfect state of happiness. A child's laughter had the power to produce a worshipful spirit, for it made us thankful to God for His gift of life, and he gift of love and of laughter. It is rare when laughter can produce that kind of pleasure and gratitude to God, but Psa. 126 reveals that it is a God ordained experience.

This Psalm is not dealing with an everyday experience. They had been in captivity in Babylon for 70 years, and they had not spent a lot of that time laughing and singing. But now they are back home, and it is like a dream. This is the only place in all the Psalms where the word dream is found. They were in a state that seemed to good to be real. After 70 years of exile where it seemed hopeless to ever return, they are now free and at home. Pinch me, they are saying, I must be dreaming, for this can't be real. This was a way of describing what seemed to good to be true. Polybius described the joy of the Greeks when they were unexpectedly rescued from the Macedonians. "Most of the men could scarcely believe the news, but imagined themselves in a dream as they listened to what was said, so extraordinary and

miraculous it seemed to them."

The saying is, if it seems to good to be true, it probably isn't true. This is a valid view to take when looking for investments, but lets not forget the Gospel itself falls into this category. It is hard for people to believe that they can be set free from all their sins and guilt by trusting in Jesus Christ, and believing that His death paid the judgment they deserve. It is like a dream to hear you can be liberated from bondage to all the sins that keep you captive to powers over which you have no control. Many hear the Gospel and their response is, "What a joke!" And they laugh it to scorn. The Bible is full of this response to the things of God. Mocking, and skeptical laughter is very common in the Old Testament, and Jesus had His share of it too. But what we seldom see is the other side: The laughter of belief, and the laughter of acceptance. Martin Luther said, "The Gospel is nothing else than laughter enjoy."

There are only two kinds of people in the world: Those who laugh at God, and those who laugh with God. If you laugh with God, you will laugh at those who laugh at God. From God's point of view the most ridiculous thing in the universe is people who choose to fight against Him. You would laugh too if a little two year old threatened to beat you up. It would be ridiculous in your sight. In Psa. 2 we read of the kings who gathered together against the Lord, and verse 4 says, "The One enthroned in heaven laughs..." In Psa. 37 we read of the wicked plotting against the wicked and verse 13 says, "But the Lord laughs at the wicked for He knows their day is coming."

There are other verses that both God and the righteous laugh at the folly of the wicked who expect their evil ways to prevail. Righteous laughter has two sides. There is laughter at the undeserved joy of being in on God's grace, and there is laughter at the stupidity of those who think the way of evil is better than the way of grace. There

is no end to the things for Christians to laugh about.

The prophets are always making fun of the folly of idolatry. The joke of the age was the idol maker who cuts down a tree, and with part of the wood he roasts his meat, and with another part he makes a god. Human nature is silly beyond comprehension, for it will bow down to a piece of wood, and ignore the God who made the wood, and man, and all the universe. The prophets did not hesitate to make jokes about such religious stupidity. Elijah went so far as to be rather crude in his mockery of religious folly. When the 450 prophets of Baal were crying out for the god Baal to hear them and send fire on the sacrifice, there was no response all morning, and they began to dance around the altar.

Elijah thought the whole scene was a major comedy of errors, and he began to mock. I share with you the Living Bible's version of his mockery because it brings out the rudeness of the Hebrew, which most versions hide as being too offensive. I Kings 18:27 reads, "About noon time, Elijah began mocking them. You'll have to shout louder than that, he scoffed, to catch the attention of your god! Perhaps he is talking to someone, or is out sitting on the toilet, or maybe he is away on a trip, or is asleep and needs to be wakened."

Humor is used as a major weapon by the prophets against the folly of worshipping idols and false gods. Laughter is a powerful weapon, and Jesus used it often in His ministry to fight the corruption that the Pharisees had brought into Judaism. This is a vast study in itself, but let me give you one paragraph from Conrad Hyers book, And God Created Laughter. He wrote this in 1987, and he says, "The Bible pokes fun at human pride and pretension, selfishness and greed, and the myriad other sins to which flesh and spirit are heir. Jesus freely used humor, irony, and satire to that end. His descriptions of the hypocrisies of the Pharisees use overtly humorous images: the blind

leading the blind; straining out a gnat, then swallowing a camel; meticulously cleaning the outside of a cup while leaving the inside filthy; maintaining whitewashed tombs that are outwardly beautiful but inwardly full of dead bones; loudly honoring past prophets while plotting to kill present ones who preach the same message."

Elton Trueblood wrote an entire book called The Humor Of Christ. He deals with the 30 passages in the Gospels where Jesus uses humor. We hardly to never laugh at these passages because we have been conditioned to never see Jesus as humorous. Jesus can talk all He wants to about the laughable nonsense of man-made religion, and He can talk of His joy being ours, and being filled with the spirit of joy, and that life with Him is a wedding banquet, but we have been so conditioned by tradition that we will not be able to join Him in laughter. He is the man of sorrows to most. But this was only a small fraction of His life. Out of His 33 years of life, He was only the man of sorrows for a matter of hours. These were crucial hours, to be sure, but they so captivated the history of art and theology that Christians have lost the picture of His total life, which was filled with much joy and laughter.

The laughter in Psa. 126 is special laughter. It is laughter that is incorporated into joyful worship. It is praise laughter. John Calvin writes of this Psalm, "He would have the people so to rejoice on account to their return, as not to bury in forgetfulness the grace of God. He therefore describes no ordinary rejoicing, but such as so fills their minds as to constrain them to break forth into extravagance of gesture and of voice." This extravagant laughter is the laughter of restoration. It is the laughter that was heard in the home of the Prodigal when he returned, and there was music, dancing, and joyous laughter, for light won out over darkness, and the son who was dead and gone is now resurrected and restored to life and family.

This is just a taste of the eternal laughter in the Father's house, where all evil will be overcome, and there will be praise laughter forever. This is what Jesus was referring to in Luke 6:21 where He said, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." The Gospel of laughter is this: no matter how rough life is, and how much sorrow its fallenness brings to you personally, there will be victory in Christ, and eternal rejoicing and laughter. God's people will have the last laugh, and it will never end.

For 70 years the nations laughed at Israel, for they were in bondage, but now they are back, and they are so blest that even the nations that laughed have to admit that God has done great things for them. The point is, you never let go of the hand of God no matter how awful and dark the path, for even if you go through the valley of shadow of death He will bring you out again into the sunshine. He will fill your mouth with laughter and songs of joy. Judgment is never the last word for those who cling to their heavenly Father. The last word will always be joy. In essence, that is the message of the book of Job. It is a book loaded with lament, but the last word is laughter, and the happy ending of joy in God is the bottom line message of the Word of God.

Laughter is, therefore, a present taste of heaven. It can be an appropriate way to rejoice in the Lord and praise Him for the great things He has done for us. Yet, in spite of all the evidence of this in the Bible we just can't accept laughter as a legitimate form of worship and praise, because it has been secularized. There are many books written on the humor of the Bible, and the humor of Jesus, but these books have little impact on Christians because we are conditioned to reject comedy as inconsistent with godliness. Comedy, humor, and satire run all through the Bible, but God's people refuse to take it seriously, and to talk about laughter in worship is considered to be borderline sacrilegious.

Surveys show that one of the key qualities that both males and females are looking for in an ideal mate is a sense of humor. Yet, when we look to the God in whose image we are made, we are afraid to attribute to Him a sense of humor, and likewise with His Son, who was the only perfect specimen of mankind ever to live. God and Jesus are suppose to be totally humorless and infinite in gravity, and so in all dealings with them we too are to be totally humorous and grave.

Great authors have fought this tendency all through history. In the middle ages you have Dante's title Divine Comedy. It is a journey from a humorless hell to a humor filled heaven. His hell is like the modern astronomer's black hole which swallows up all light, and is black with self-centeredness. It is the least comic place in the universe. But Dante moves from this black hole of hell to the light of heaven, where love and joy are all embracing. Dante exclaims as he approaches the 8th level of heaven: "I seemed to see the universe alight with a single smile." The nearer we get to heaven the wider the smile, and the greater the laughter. This is an authentic biblical message.

When Adam and Eve fell they fell from laughter by taking themselves too seriously. Satan did not get to them by getting them to engage in enjoying their abundance to excess. He got them to focus on their one area of denial, and become serious about this issue. They were deprived. They were being mistreated. Life was unfair. Pride was exalted, and a rebellious spirit took over. Their deadly serious attitude lead them to lose heaven on earth, and gain a hell on earth. Laughter is a focus on the things to celebrate about life. Laughter is the is the guest at parties, feasts, reunions, weddings, birthdays, and holidays. People are saying yes to life in laughter, and they are enjoying their life and their loves.

Remove laughter, and start taking all of life very serious, and you

will focus on the fear, the dangers, and the risks. Problems will grow, and obstacles will rise up to make life a mountain climb of extreme difficulty. The less laughter in your life, the more you will make life a burden rather than a blessing. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Humor involves a sense of proportion and a power of seeing yourself from the outside. Whatever else we attribute to beings who sinned through pride, we must not attribute this....We must picture Hell as a state where everyone is perpetually concerned about his own dignity and advancement, where everyone has a grievance, and where everyone lives the deadly serious passions of envy, self-importance and resentment."

In contrast to this we look at the early Christians in the book of Acts, and we see just the opposite of this serious self-centeredness. We see joyful otherness as they shared together, and cared about the whole body, and not just their own life. I was surprised when I looked up the word gladness in Acts 2:46-47. Listen to the context: "Everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."

My surprise was this: There are 9 different Hebrew and Greek words behind our English word gladness, but the most forceful of them all is the one in this text. It is the word agalliasis. It is a word of such overwhelming gladness that it can't remain just a feeling. It has to be expressed by the body in leaping for joy. Jesus used it in Matt. 5:12 where he says when you suffer persecution and evil because of Him, "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven." You can laugh at those who hurt you for your faith in Christ, for every pain they inflict is a deposit in your eternal bank account. You can laugh even though it hurts, because in their efforts to make you miserable they are really making you rich. This is one of God's jokes on a fallen rebellious world.

Peter uses this same strong word in his sermon at Pentecost as he quotes the Old Testament passage which describes the death and resurrection of the Messiah. Listen carefully because we miss the amazing message of Peter that Jesus could laugh at death and hell, and be filled with gladness as He faced the cross, for He knew God's big joke was to be the resurrection. The pain would be temporary, but the pleasure would be forever. Listen to all the positive words that surround the awful death Jesus had to endure. Remember, the word glad here means to leap for joy.

Acts 2:25-28: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence."

Jesus actually did what He said we could do. He practiced what He preached. When evil threw its worst at Him, He laughed and leaped for joy, for He knew His reward was eternal pleasure, not only for himself, but for all the redeemed. The biggest joke in the universe is that God took the greatest act of evil in history, and turned it into the greatest act of salvation. The cross was the devil's masterpiece of hate and horror, but God made it the greatest symbol of love and victory. We can look at the cross and laugh with God, for the cross is the guarantee that all tears will be wiped away, and sin and sorrow be no more in that kingdom where we will laugh and leap for joy forever. It was that scene of eternal joy that enabled Jesus to endure the cross.

Heb. 12:2 says, " Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus could endure hell for us because He could see

beyond it to the laughter of heaven. This is also the key to our enduring a fallen world. It is the joy of the Lord that is our strength, and that joy can be manifested in the praise of laughter.

11. HEAVEN'S HALLELUJAH CHORUS based on Rev. 19:1-10

It is a good thing God enjoys laughter because some of life's funniest moments happen in church. Carolyn Crane tells about how her husband Dan stood up for the final hymn one Sunday, and his foot had gone to sleep; it buckled under him, and he fell sideways into the aisle. Two men came quickly to his aid, and they got him back into the pew on his one good leg. A third man would have helped too, but he was laughing so hard, he was of no use. Dan stood through the closing hymn on one leg, like a stork, or the crane that he was. His wife could tell by the many different versions of the song that people were having a hard time concentrating. But by the end of the hymn things seemed just about back under control. Then the pastor stood up and dismissed the congregation with the benediction--"And now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling..." Even the most solemn and pious could not restrain their laughter.

It may seem like an inappropriate way to end a service, but in the light of Revelation 19, it may not be at all, for hilarity seems to be commonplace in heaven. This chapter is loaded with extreme excitement and exuberance in the very presence of God. The entire population of the redeemed of all time, plus the innumerable angelic host, and every being in the universe capable of making sound, joined in the wildest and loudest display of emotion that we have on record.

The apostle John is an old man as he is having this heavenly vision, but he has no problem hearing the song. He says it was like a roar, and the great multitude was shouting. They were joined by another vast choir who cried out, and then another multitude joined in like a roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder. One thing is for sure, nobody will ever go to sleep in a heavenly praise service. Thank God we will have new bodies that will not get headaches when the volume reaches thunder levels.

What we have here in Rev.19 is the heartiest, happiest, holiest, heavenliest Hallelujah Chorus of all times. The whole universe of beings is roaring with rejoicing, and shouting with a song of supreme satisfaction, because of the battle of good and evil has been won, and good is the victor. The forces of darkness and evil have been defeated, and the winners are celebrating. They have won the gold in the universal Olympics, and they are compelled to praise God at the top of their voices for this ultimate victory. Thus, we have a song like no other in the entire Bible. This heavenly Hallelujah Chorus stands alone as--

- 1. The loudest song in the Bible.**
- 2. The most universal song in the Bible.**
- 3. The song most full of Hallelujah in the Bible. Four times in verses 1-6. This is the only place in the New Testament where the word is used.**

4. It is the happiest song in the Bible, for it celebrates the victory over evil, and the wedding of Christ and His Bride.

God gave John this vision and that is why we have this record of the heavenly Hallelujah Chorus. The famous earthly Hallelujah Chorus by George Frederic Handel also had its origin in a God given vision. Handel was in a severe state of depression in 1741. He was 57 years old, deeply in debt, and going nowhere. He began to read a Sacred Oratorio, where the words of Isaiah caught his attention--"Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." He was inspired to compose, and for 24 days he remained in seclusion to write. He sometimes would not eat his food. At times he would jump up and wave his hands in the air shouting Hallelujah. Later he reported, "I think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God Himself."

His Messiah was first performed in Dublin, Ireland in 1742, and it was an immediate success. It circled the globe as one of the musical masterpieces of all times. Newman Flower said, "Considering the immensity of the work, and the short time involved in putting it to paper, it will remain, perhaps forever, the greatest feat in the whole history of musical composition."

I don't think it is a mere coincidence that the great song on earth and the great song in heaven are both Hallelujah Choruses. Hallelujah means praise the Lord, or praise Jehovah, and it will be a major word in our vocabulary for all eternity. It is the main word in the chorus of The Battle Hymn Of The Republic--"Glory! glory! hallelujah! Glory! glory! hallelujah! Glory! glory! hallelujah! His truth is marching on!" It is the same for the popular revival hymn, Revive Us Again. "Hallelujah, Thine the glory! Hallelujah, Amen! Hallelujah, Thine the glory! Revive us again." In other hymns the word is Alleluia, which is just another form of hallelujah. It is found in

numerous songs that we sing, and it will be a key word in our praises forever.

It is a feeling word that comes to the lips from a mind and heart filled with joyful gratitude to God. It is a victory shout for the good news that history has a happy ending. The good guys win, and the bad guys are toppled from power. All the rotten deals of history are rectified and made right. Babylon the great has fallen. She represents all the forces of evil in the world that have made life miserable for God's people. Not one in justice will escape. All will be made right. Life is not fair, but God is, and in the end we will praise Him, for we will see everything work out just as it should. As one author said,

"The angels rejoiced here because for centuries they have been watching from heaven unpunished in justices, prospering wickedness, triumphing evil, and unchecked immorality. Meanwhile, the righteous suffer, good causes go begging, and honor and honesty go unrewarded. Now the accounts are settled. Every drop of blood shed in injustice will be avenged. The scales of eternal justice will be in perfect balance! God will have settled the score. When the hosts of heaven see the world system, the prostitute, gets what is coming to her, they shout with joy, "Hallelujah!" Author unknown

History ends like most every good book and movie does. The bad guys, who have thrown a monkey wrench into the machinery of life, robbing people of freedom, joy, love, and romance are removed from the stage, so life can go on as God intended, with pleasures forevermore at His right hand.

What an encouragement this chapter was to the Christians going

through terrible times of persecution, and what an encouragement to all who get weary of this fallen world with all of its corruption and injustice. There is so much that is rotten and wrong with this world, but in the end we will be singing a victory song--"Hallelujah! for the Lord God Almighty reigns!" We look beyond the present evil to the glorious future, for that is how Jesus faced the cross, and that is how we can face a fallen world.

The world may beat us, the world may bore us,
But in the end we will sing this chorus,
Hallelujah Amen!
God will judge all that's wrong,
And we will ever sing this song,
Hallelujah Amen!

History is filled with the sad and the gory.
Heaven will be glad as we give God the glory.
Hallelujah Amen!

The night of sorrow has passed away.
Its now eternal wedding day.
Hallelujah Amen!

Author unknown

This Hallelujah Chorus is the song of eternal optimism. It is the foundation for the fight against all injustice and corruption, for it is the guarantee that the fight will end in victory. Light will win over darkness, and so we can sing hallelujah even when darkness seems to dominate, for we know it is only temporary. Caesar will reign for awhile, and Hitler will reign for awhile, but God reigns forever. That is why hail Caesar and Heil Hitler are now obsolete, but Hallelujah to Jesus never will be. This Hallelujah Chorus will always be no. 1 in the hymnal of heaven.

Wars have characterized the reigns of men, but God's reign is one of peace. This Hallelujah Chorus is the celebration of the war that really does end all wars, which is described in detail at the end of the chapter. This chapter of the Bible is the audio-visual dept. of the ultimate triumph of good over evil. It gives us the message both verbally and visually of the final victory.

**Our ears are bombarded with sounds.
Our eyes are bombarded with sights.
Both the vocal and visual abounds,
To lift our feelings to the heights.**

The powerful image of Jesus riding on a white horse to victory over the forces of evil is praise visualized. The Hallelujah Chorus vocalizes the victory, and the horse and rider visualize it. The whole point of the book of Revelation is to appeal to the emotions and the imagination, and fill Christians with a spirit of praise. Revelation is to the New Testament what the Psalms are to the Old Testament. It is a book of poetry and imagery, to give Christians, even in the toughest of times, reasons for rejoicing. Do you need motivation to sing songs in the night? Here is your resource for inspiration. This is not a manual of technical information, but a work of art, designed to inspire us to worship and to service. You can take a flower apart and learn something of its structure, or you can gaze on its beauty and praise the God who created such a work of art. There is value in both, but often Christians are more interested in tearing the book of Revelation apart, than in being moved by its message of hope and beauty, to praise the God who will give us the final victory.

What good is it to know the meaning of the 144,000, the ten horns of the beast, the number 666, and a host of other numbers, if you miss the number one purpose of the book, which is to get you to praise God and sing hallelujah? All you can learn about the book of Revelation is

not worth a lady finger firecracker if it does not lead you to praise. Most all commentators are agreed, all of the visions of the book are conveying the same basic message--praise God for He is on the throne, and His will be the final word. History will ultimately be His Story, and it will have a gloriously happy ending.

There is an amazing congregation of women who really believe this, and their motto is Amen! Alleluia! They are all handicapped, blind, deaf, and crippled, but they say Amen-so be it. We accept our lot in life, though it is unfair, not grudgingly, but in loyal submission to our King. We say praise the Lord, or alleluia because we expect Him to work in all things for the good of those who love Him. All self-pity is ruled out, and their focus is on praise. They may not know who the anti-Christ is, but they know who Christ is, and they have grasped the essence of the message of Revelation, for their song is ever Amen, Alleluia!

This passage makes it clear, it is not just the chief end of man to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, it is also the chief end of angels and animals and all of creation. The angels were the first to see evil when they saw the fall of Lucifer and his angels. Then man followed in his fall, and then the whole of creation had to suffer the effects of sin. God will reverse all of this, and all that was touched by sin will be restored to original perfection. That is why the Hallelujah Chorus of heaven is so universal. All will glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

In verse 4 we see the 24 elders and the four living creatures which represent all the redeemed of all ages, and all the living creatures of God's creation falling down and worshipping. The worshipped in praise, and what we need to see is, worship and praise are synonymous. They have the same root meaning.

Worship comes from worthship and means full of worth. When

you worship God you are acknowledging Him as the ultimate worth or value in your life. People do not worship the worthless. All that people worship they consider to be of the utmost worth. Whatever has the highest value to a person is their god. In worship we declare the worth of who, or what, we worship.

Praise comes the Latin, pretiare--to prize. To prize something is to value it highly, and treasure it's worth. Thus, to praise God or to worship God means the same thing. It is to acknowledge, declare, and rejoice in His worth. Your whole value system is revealed in who or what you praise. That is why Hallelujah is the highest word in worship and praise, for it means praise Jehovah. There is no higher value, and no person of worth, that is above Jehovah. Praise the Lord is the English translation of hallelujah, and, therefore, the ultimate phrase of praise.

To acknowledge anyone or anything, beside God, as having ultimate worth, is idolatry. John the apostle is pictured as blowing it in verse 10 to make it clear for all time, that nothing less than God is to be worshiped. Not even the angel who reveals the most amazing scenes ever before revealed. John fell at the angels feet to worship, but was instantly rebuked. The angel said he was just a fellow servant. He may have been endowed by God with gifts beyond anything John could ever dream of, but he was just a servant of God. He said to John, "Worship God!"

What a powerful lesson on the whole matter of superstars. The world is full of people who can do things the rest of us cannot do. They can sing, act, play sports, or do other things that amaze us. We feel the tug toward hero worship, and we want to fall before them and adore their gifts. They have a hard time being honest like the angel. They do not say I am but a servant of God, worship Him. They say keep on bowing and keep on giving me money and honor.

Every example of hero worship in the New Testament is rejected. In Acts 10:25-26 we read, "As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. Stand up, he said, I am only a man." A gifted man to be sure, and the one God used to bring Cornelius into the kingdom, but Peter rejected hero worship and pointed Cornelius to Christ, who alone is worthy of worship. In Acts 14:11-18 we read of how the people of Lystra were so impressed with Paul, they shouted the gods have come down to us, and they began to worship Paul and Barnabas. But they tore their clothes and Paul said in verse 15, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God." These two plus the two times John is rebuked for trying to worship the angel, make it clear, God alone has the exclusive right to be worshiped.

All the focus on exalting personalities is a very worldly practice. The church is not to conform to the world in this matter, but it often does. We forget that the gifts are from God, and we begin to worship the person with the gifts, rather than the source of the gifts. The church has it's cult of celebrities just as Hollywood does, and Christians debate who is the biggest, brightest, or most beautiful. This is not all bad, for there needs to be Christians on every level of society to witness to the lost on that level. But there is risk. The risk is that the celebrity will develop the Lucifer syndrome, and begin to feel worthy of worship. The risk for the hero worshiper is that they will forget to acknowledge God as the giver of the value they receive through the celebrity.

The Bible has the answer to both of these risks in one word--Hallelujah! Whenever you feel the emotion of gratitude for any value in life, don't stop short of the highest, but go right to the top, and praise the Lord. This does not mean you do not thank the servant

who was the channel of God's blessing. You do! But you praise God as the source of that blessing. If we could be practicing this one hundred percent, we would be singing hallelujah all day long. I think this is what Paul meant when he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice." He is saying, everything of worth that happens to you is to move you to praise the Lord. May God help us in our daily walk to be more conscious of God's blessings, and thus, be ever joining with the choir of heaven in singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

