

Praise

by Watchman Nee

PRAISING

Praise is the highest work carried out by God's children. We can say that the highest expression of a saint's spiritual life is his praise to God. God's throne is the highest point in the universe, yet He sits "enthroned upon the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3). God's name and even God Himself are exalted through praise.

David said in a psalm that he prayed to God three times a day (Psalm 55:17). Yet in another psalm, he said that he praised God seven times a day (119:164). David was inspired by the Holy Spirit when he acknowledged the importance of praising. He prayed only three times a day, but he praised seven times a day. Furthermore, he appointed Levites to play psalteries and harps to exalt, thank, and praise God before the ark of His covenant (1 Chronicles 16:4-6). When Solomon completed the building of Jehovah's temple, the priests carried the ark of the covenant into the Holy of Holies. When the priests came out of the Holy Place, the Levites stood beside the altar, sounded the trumpets, and sang with cymbals, psalteries, and harps. Together they sounded praises to God. At that moment, the glory of Jehovah filled His house (2 Chronicles. 5:12-14). Both David and Solomon touched God's heart and offered up sacrifices of praise that were pleasing to God. Jehovah is enthroned upon the praises of Israel. We should praise the Lord all our life. We should sing praises to our God.

I. THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE

The Bible pays much attention to praise. It is spoken of frequently in the Scriptures. The book of Psalms is full of praises. The book of Psalms is in fact a book of praise in the Old Testament. Many praises are quoted from Psalms.

However, the Psalms contain chapters not only of praises but also of suffering. God wants His people to know that the praising ones are the very ones who have been led through trying situations and whose feelings have been wounded. These psalms show us men led by God through shadows of darkness. They were rejected, slandered, and persecuted. "All Your waves and Your billows / Pass over me" (42:7). Yet God perfected praises out of these ones. Words of praise do not always come from the mouths of the smooth-sailing ones. They come much more from those who are under discipline and trial. In the Psalms we can touch the most wounded feelings, and in the Psalms we also can find the greatest and highest praises. God uses many hardships, difficulties, and slanders to create praises in His people. He causes them to learn through difficult circumstances to become praising persons before the Lord.

The happiest persons are not always the ones who have the loudest praise. The loudest praise comes very often from the ones who are passing through hardships. This kind of praise is most pleasing to God and is blessed by Him. God does not want men to praise

Him only when they are on the mountaintop surveying Canaan, the promised land. God desires much more to see His people writing psalms and praising Him when they “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (23:4). This is genuine praise.

This shows us the nature of praise in the eyes of God. The nature of praise is an offering, a sacrifice. In other words, praise comes from pain and suffering. Hebrews 13:15 says, “Through Him then let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually to God, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name.” What is a sacrifice? A sacrifice is an offering. An offering means death and loss. The person who offers an offering must suffer some loss. An offering, a sacrifice, must be offered up. This offering up constitutes a loss. The bull and the lamb are yours. When you offer them up, you are sacrificing them. To offer up something does not mean to gain anything; it means to suffer a loss. When a person offers up his praise, he is losing something; he is offering a sacrifice to God. In other words, God inflicts wounds; He breaks and cuts a person deeply, yet at the same time, such a person turns to Him and praises Him. Suffering for the sake of offering God praise is a kind of offering. God likes men to praise Him in this way. God likes to be enthroned upon this kind of praise. How can God receive His praise? God wants His children to praise Him in the midst of their sufferings. We should not praise only when there is gain. Although praise offered as a result of gain is praise, it cannot be considered an offering. The principle of offering is based on loss. An offering carries with it the element of loss. God wants us to praise Him in the midst of our loss. This makes a real offering.

We should not only pray to God but also learn all the more to praise God. We need to see the significance of praise at the very beginning of our Christian walk. We must praise God unceasingly. David received grace from God to praise seven times a day. It is a good exercise, a very good lesson, and a very good spiritual practice to praise God every day. We should learn to praise God when we get up early in the morning. We should learn to praise Him when we encounter problems, when we are at a meeting, or when we are alone. We should praise God at least seven times a day. Do not let David beat us in his praise. If we have not learned to praise God every day, it is hard to have the kind of sacrifice of praise spoken of in Hebrews 13.

As you learn to praise, you will find that there are days in which you cannot gather yourself to praise. Perhaps you praised God seven times today, yesterday, and the day before. Perhaps you praised Him a week or a month ago. But one day you will find that you cannot utter a praise. On such days you are in pain, total darkness, or dire trouble. On such days you suffer misunderstanding and slander. You are busy shedding tears of self-pity. How can you praise God on such days? You cannot praise because you are wounded, suffering pain, and in difficulty. You feel that the most obvious response would be complaint rather than praise. You feel that the most obvious thing to do would be to murmur rather than give thanks. You do not feel like praising, and you have no intention to praise. You feel that praise is not suitable under this kind of circumstance and mood. At that very moment, you should remember that Jehovah’s throne has not changed, His name has not changed, and His glory has not changed. You should praise Him simply because He is worthy of praise. You should bless Him simply because He is worthy of all blessings. Although you are in the midst of difficulties, He is still worthy to be praised. Although you are in distress, you still have to praise Him. At that moment, your praise

becomes a sacrifice of praise. Your praise is like the slaughter of your fattest calf. It is like putting your dear Isaac on the altar. Your praise in tears is a sacrifice of praise. What is an offering? An offering implies wounds, death, loss, and sacrifice. You are wounded before God. You die before God. You suffer loss, and you sacrifice before God. But you realize that God's throne is established in the heavens and cannot be shaken, and you do not hold back your praise. This is the sacrifice of praise. God desires His children to praise Him in everything and through every situation.

II. PRAISE AND VICTORY

We have seen that our praise is a sacrifice. But there is more. We have to see that praising is the way to overcome spiritual attacks. Many people say that Satan is afraid of the prayers of God's children; he flees whenever God's children kneel down to pray. This is why he often attacks God's children and frustrates them from praying. This is a common attack. But we will point out another fact: Satan's greatest attacks are not aimed at prayers; his greatest attacks are aimed at praise. This does not mean that Satan does not attack prayers. The moment a Christian prays, Satan begins to attack. It is very easy to talk to people, but the moment one prays, Satan comes with problems. He will make one feel that it is hard to pray. This is a fact. But Satan does not attack just prayer; he also attacks the praise of God's children. The ultimate goal of Satan is to stop all praises to God. Prayer is a warfare, but praise is a victory. Prayer signifies spiritual warfare, but praise signifies spiritual victory. Whenever we praise, Satan flees. Therefore, Satan hates our praising the most. He will use all his strength to stop our praising. God's children are foolish if they stop praising when they suffer under adverse environments and downtrodden feelings. But as they come to know God more, they will find that even a Philippian jail can become a place of songs (Acts 16:25). Paul and Silas were praising God inside the jail cell. Their praise broke loose all the jail doors.

Jail doors were opened twice in Acts. Once they were opened to Peter and once to Paul. In Peter's case, the church prayed fervently for him, and an angel opened the door and brought him out (12:3-12). In Paul's case, he and Silas sang hymns of praise to God, and all the doors opened and the chains broke. The jailer believed in the Lord on that day, and his whole family was saved in a joyful way (16:19-34). Paul and Silas offered the sacrifice of praise in the jail. The wounds on their bodies were not yet healed; their pain was not soothed. Their feet were in the stocks, and they were shut in an inner jail of the Roman Empire. What was there to be joyful about? What was there to sing about? But there were two persons with transcendent spirits, who had surpassed everything. They saw that God was still sitting in the heavens; He had not changed at all. They themselves might have changed, their environment might have changed, their feelings might have changed, and their bodies might have been suffering, but God was still sitting on the throne. He was still worthy of their blessings. Our brothers, Paul and Silas, were praying, singing, and praising God. This kind of praise, which arises out of pain and loss, is a sacrifice of praise. This kind of praise is a victory.

When you pray, you are still in the midst of your situation. But when you praise, you soar above your situation. While you are praying and pleading, you are bound by your affairs; you are not out of them. The more you plead, the more you find yourself bound and

pressed. But if God takes you above the jail, the chains, the painful wounds on the body, the suffering, and the shame, you will offer praises to His name. Paul and Silas sang hymns. They sang praises to God. They were brought by God to the point where the jail, the shame, and the pain were no longer a problem to them. They could praise God. When they praised in such a way, the doors of the jail opened, the chains fell off, and even the jailer was saved.

Many times praise works where prayer fails. This is a very basic principle. If you cannot pray, why not praise? The Lord has placed another item in your hands for your victory and for you to boast in victory. Whenever you run out of strength to pray and you find your spirit heavily oppressed, wounded, or sagging, praise Him. If you cannot pray, try to praise. We invariably think that we should pray when the burden is heavy and praise when the burden is over. But please bear in mind that there are times when the burden is so heavy that you cannot pray. That is the time for you to praise. We do not praise when there is no burden; we praise when the burden becomes too heavy. When you encounter unusual circumstances and problems and are bewildered and feel like collapsing, just remember one thing, "Why not praise?" Here is a golden opportunity. If you offer your praise at that moment, God's Spirit will operate in you, open all the doors, and break all the chains.

We need to learn to maintain this lofty spirit, this spirit that surpasses all attacks. Prayers may not bring us to the throne, but praise surely brings us to the throne at any time. Prayers may not enable us to overcome every time, but praise does not fail even once. God's children should open their mouths to praise Him, not only when they are free from problems, hurts, wounds, or difficulties, but even more when there are problems and wounds. When one lifts up his head in these situations and says, "Lord, I praise You," his eyes may be filled with tears, but his mouth will be filled with praise. His heart may be in pain, but his spirit will still praise. His spirit will soar as high as his praise. He can ascend with his praises. Those who murmur are foolish. The more they murmur, the more they are buried under their murmurings. The more they complain, the more they sink into their complaints. The more they allow their problems to overtake them, the more exhausted they become. Many people seem to be a little more aggressive; they pray when they have problems. They strive and struggle to get out of their situations. Even though their circumstances and wounds try to bury them, they are not willing to be buried, and they try to get out by prayers. They often do manage to get out by praying. But there are also times when prayer does not work. Nothing seems to be able to deliver them until they praise. You need to offer up the sacrifice of praise. This means you need to consider praise a sacrifice and offer it up to God. When you put yourself in such an overcoming position, you immediately transcend everything, and no problem will be able to bury you. Sometimes you may feel that something is trying to run you over. But as soon as you praise, you will come out of your depression.

Let us look at 2 Chronicles 20:20-22. "And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper. And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of

holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.” Here was a battle. The nation of Judah was coming to an end at the time of Jehoshaphat’s rule. It was very weak; everything was in a state of shambles. The Moabites, Ammonites, and the people of Mount Seir came to invade Judah. Judah was completely in despair; they felt that defeat was certain. Jehoshaphat was a revived king and a God-fearing person. Of course, none of the last kings of Judah was perfect, but nevertheless, Jehoshaphat was a person seeking after God. He told Judah to believe in God. What did he do? He appointed singers to sing praises to Jehovah. He also asked these ones to praise the beauty of holiness and to walk out before the army and to say, “Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever.” Please note the words when they began in the following verse. It is a very precious word. “And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir.” When they began means at that very moment. When everyone was singing praises to Jehovah, He rose to smite the Ammonites, Moabites, and the people of Mount Seir. Nothing moves the Lord’s hand as quickly as praise. Prayer is not the fastest way to move the Lord’s hand; praise is the fastest way. Please do not misunderstand that we do not have to pray. We need to pray, and we need to pray every day. However, we can overcome many things only by praising.

Here we see that spiritual victory does not depend on warfare but on praising. We need to learn to overcome Satan by our praise. We overcome Satan not only by prayer but also by praise. Many people are conscious of Satan’s ferocity and their own weaknesses, and they resolve to struggle and pray. However, we find a very unique principle here: Spiritual victory does not depend on warfare but on praise. God’s children often are tempted to think that their problems are too big and that they have to find some way to deal with their problems. They pay much attention to finding a way to overcome. But the more they try to come up with a way, the harder it is for them to overcome. In doing so, they put themselves on Satan’s level. They are both in the battle; Satan is fighting on one side, and they are fighting on the other side. It is not easy to win from this position. But 2 Chronicles 20 gives a different picture. On one side was the army, and on the other side was the singing of hymns. These ones either had great faith in God, or they were crazy. Thank God, we are not crazy people. We are those who have faith in God.

Many of God’s children are under severe trials; they are frequently tested. When the trials become severe and the warfare turns fierce, they are like Jehoshaphat. They are shut in by their trouble. One side is too strong, and the other side too weak; there is no comparison between the two. They are trapped inside the whirling wind. Their problems are too great and beyond their ability to overcome. At such times, it is easy for them to turn their attention to their problems; it is easy for their eyes to be set on their own difficulties. The more a man goes through trials, the easier it is for him to be bound by his problems. This becomes a great time of testing. The greatest test comes when he looks at himself or his environment. The more a man is tested, the more he tends to look at himself or his environment. But for those who know God, the more they are tested, the more they put their trust in the Lord. The more they are tested, the more they learn to praise. Therefore, we must learn not to set our eyes on ourselves. We must learn to set

our eyes on the Lord. We should lift up our heads and tell the Lord, “You are above everything; I praise You!” Loud praises, praises that issue from the heart, and the praises that flow out of wounded feelings are the sacrifices of praise pleasing and acceptable to God. Once the sacrifice of praise ascends to God, the enemy, Satan, is defeated by the praise. The sacrifice of praise is very effective before God. Let your loftiest praises burst forth to God, and you will surely withstand and overcome. When you praise, you will find the way of victory opening wide before your eyes!

New believers should not think that they have to pass through many years before they can learn the lesson of praise. They should realize that they can start praising immediately. Every time you encounter a problem, you should pray for mercy that you would stop manipulating and plotting and that you would learn the lesson of praising instead. Much warfare can be won by praise. Many battles are lost because of the lack of praise. If you believe in God, you can tell the Lord in the midst of your problems, “I praise Your name. You are higher than everything. You are stronger than everything. Your lovingkindness endures forever!” A person who praises God transcends everything. He overcomes continually by his praise. This is a principle, and this is also a fact.

III. FAITH-PRODUCING PRAISE

Psalm 106:12 is a very precious word. “Then they believed His words; / They sang His praise.” This was the condition of the children of Israel in the wilderness. They believed, and they sang. They believed, so they praised. Praise has a basic ingredient—faith. You cannot praise vainly with the mouth. You cannot say in a flippant way, “I thank the Lord! I praise the Lord!” You must believe. Only after you have believed can you praise. When you have some problems or when you are sorrowful, you pray, and as you pray, a kind of faith rises up in your heart. At that moment you open your mouth to praise. This is the living way, but do not do this in a light manner. When a man is faced with a problem, he should pray. But as soon as he finds a little faith, as soon as he begins to believe in God and in His greatness, power, compassion, glory, and manifestation of His glory, he should begin to praise. If a man acquires faith but does not follow it up with praise, he will soon find that his faith is gone. We are saying this from our experience. Once you have faith within, you should praise. If you do not praise, you will lose your faith after a while. You may have faith now. But after a while, you will lose that faith. Therefore, we must learn to praise. We must learn to utter words of praise. We have to open our mouths to praise. We should have not only a mind to praise but also actual audible words of praise. You have to praise God in the face of all your problems and in the face of Satan. You should say, “O Lord! I praise You!” Do this until you turn from having no feeling to having feeling, or from having a feeble feeling to a strong feeling. Do this until you turn from little faith to full faith.

Once God’s glory fills your eyes, you can believe. Once His glory fills your spirit, you can praise. You have to see that God is above everything and is worthy of your praise. When you praise, Satan flees away. Sometimes we need to pray. But when our prayer reaches the point where we have faith and assurance, we know that the Lord has answered our prayer, and we should praise: “Lord! I thank You! I praise You! This matter is already settled!” Do not wait for the matter to be over before you praise. We have to praise as

soon as we believe. Do not wait until the enemy runs away to sing. We have to sing to chase him away. We have to learn to praise by faith. When we praise Him in faith, the enemy will be defeated and driven away. We have to believe before we can praise. First we believe and praise, and then we will experience victory.

IV. OBEDIENCE BRINGING IN PRAISE

Our problems mainly fall within two categories. The first category is problems arising from the environment and the affairs around us. This was Jehoshaphat's problem. The way to overcome this kind of problem is by praise. The second category is the problems within us. Words may hurt us. Others may offend, persecute, mistreat, oppose, hate us for no reason, or slander us without any basis. We may find these things unbearable, and we cannot get over them. These problems have to do with our personal victory. A brother may say something which is not proper. A sister may treat you in an unreasonable way. You may find it almost impossible to overcome these things. Your whole being may struggle, complain, and cry for justice. You may find it difficult to forgive or pardon others. It is hard for you to overcome your feeling. You are wronged, slandered, persecuted, and you cannot get over it. Prayer does not help much. You want to fight and struggle against it, but you cannot. The more you try to shake off this burden, the worse you become. You find it hard to overcome. Please remember that when you suffer great personal hardship and severe injustice, it is not the time for you to pray, but the time for you to praise. You should bow your head and say to the Lord, "I thank You. You are never wrong in what You do. I accept all these things from Your hands. I thank You. I praise You." If you do this, all your problems will go away. Victory has nothing to do with struggling with the flesh. It has nothing to do with trying to forgive others or striving to pardon others with one's own strength. Victory comes when one bows his head and praises the Lord: "I praise You for Your way. Your arrangement is always good. Whatever You do is right." When you praise the Lord this way, your spirit will soar above your problems; it will soar above your inner wounds. Those who are wounded in their feelings are short of praise. If you can praise the Lord, your hurt will turn into praise. Your spirit will transcend to the heights, and you will say to God, "I thank and praise You. You are never wrong in all Your ways." This is the pathway we should take before the Lord. Leave everything behind. What a glory this is. This is truly a sacrifice.

The Christian life soars through praises. To praise is to transcend everything to touch the Lord. This was the pathway our Lord Jesus took when He was on earth. We should take the same way. We should not murmur against heaven when we are under trials. We should soar above the trials. Once we praise, we are above the trials. The more others try to put us down, the more we should rise up before the Lord and say, "I thank You and praise You!" Learn to accept everything. Learn to know that He is God. Learn to know the works of His hands. Nothing can ripen and mature a man like sacrifices of praise. We need to learn not only to accept the discipline of the Holy Spirit but also to praise the discipline of the Holy Spirit. We need to learn not only to accept but also to glory in the Lord's dealing. We need to learn not only to accept the Lord's chastisement but also to accept it willingly with joy. If we do this, a clear and glorious door will be opened to us.

V. PRAISING BEFORE UNDERSTANDING

Finally, in Psalm 50:23 God says, "Whoever offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifies Me." Here, the word thanksgiving can also be translated as praise. The Lord is waiting for our praises. Nothing can glorify our God as praises can. One day, all the prayers, works, prophesying, and labor will be over. But on that day our praises will be more than today's. Praise will last for eternity; it will never cease. When we reach heaven and arrive at our final home, our praises will swell even higher. Today we have the opportunity to learn the best lesson; we can learn to praise God even today.

Today is still the time when we see in a mirror obscurely (1 Corinthians. 13:12). Although we can see a little of many things, we cannot understand the meaning behind them. We can only feel the pain of all the inward wounds and outward trials that we have encountered and experienced. We cannot comprehend the significance behind them. This is why we do not praise. We believe that praises will abound in heaven because there will be full knowledge in heaven. The fuller the knowledge, the fuller the praise. Everything will be clear when we go before the Lord on that day. The things that are unclear to us today will be clear to us on that day. On that day we will see the Lord's excellent will in every step of the Spirit's discipline. Had there been no discipline of the Spirit, we cannot imagine how much we would have fallen! If some of our footsteps had not been stopped by the Holy Spirit, we cannot imagine how pitiful our fall would have been! Many things, thousands and even millions of things which we do not see today, will become clear to us on that day. When we see everything on that day, we will bow our head and praise Him, saying, "Lord, You were never wrong." Every step of the Spirit's discipline is God's work in us. Had we not become sick that one time, what would have become of us? Had we not failed that one time, what would have become of us? What we faced may have been a problem, but through facing that problem we may have avoided greater problems. What we encountered may have been a misfortune, but through that encounter we may have avoided greater misfortunes. On that day we will see why the Lord allowed all these things to happen to us. Today the Lord is leading us on, every step of the way. On that day we will bow our heads and say, "Lord, I was a fool, because I did not praise You that day. I was a fool, because I did not give thanks to You that day." When our eyes are opened and we become clear on that day, how very shameful we will be when we recall our murmurings. Therefore, today we must learn to say, "Lord, I cannot understand what You are doing, but I know that You cannot be wrong." We have to learn to believe and to praise. If we do, we will say on that day, "Lord! I thank You for Your grace which saved me from unnecessary complaints and murmurings. Lord! I thank You for the grace which kept me from murmuring during those days." For many things, the more knowledge we have, the greater will our praises be. We have a desire to praise the Lord because He is good (Psalm. 25:8; 100:5). We need to always say, "The Lord is good." Today we have to learn to believe that the Lord is good and that He is never wrong, even though we cannot always understand what He is doing. If we believe, we will praise. Our praises are His glory. To praise is to glorify God. God is worthy of all glory. May God gain abundant praises from His children.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. Jude 1:24-25

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