

Thanksgiving and praise in prayer

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[0:00] praising that which is the most praiseworthy. And the most praiseworthy thing in all of existence is the Lord God himself, the one who made all of existence.

These are from my quiet times this week. I was very struck by what God says in Isaiah. Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

God made people for his glory to go, God, you're brilliant. Later on in the very same chapter, he says this. These people whom I formed for myself, that they might declare my praise.

Why did God form a people? To praise him. That's why we exist. Similar sort of thing in 1 Peter, chapter 2. Peter says this, of Christians, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's possession.

Why? That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. The reason God called us from darkness into light to be his own possession is that we might declare his excellencies.

[1:10] The point of us, the point of our existence, the point of our salvation, ultimately, is that we might praise that which is the most praiseworthy, God himself. That is why we are.

That is what we'll be for the rest of forever. Now, someone might object, they might think it's a bit odd and arrogant for God to sort of make a people to worship him. I mean, I don't want my baby boy when he's born to worship me.

That's not the reason I've got a baby boy. So why would God do that? Why would God make a people to praise him? Why is that the point of us? We forget, though, when we make an objection like that, that God is infinitely glorious.

That's just who God is. To want his creatures to worship the creator is the most appropriate thing. It's the most obvious thing. It's not like a human being worshipping, if I wanted people to worship me, it would be inappropriate because they're just other people.

But God is so different in order to us. God is the all-powerful, infinite creator, all-knowing, all-powerful, who created everything with a word, all the things that he was saying in those prayers.

[2:15] God is perfectly pure in heart. God is completely different in order to us. God is different in order to us as a skyscraper is to a Lego house, as a planet is to a pebble on a beach, is our God to us.

So God is inherently praiseworthy. And worshipping God is the most wonderful and natural thing to do. Again, I was reading recently in Revelation chapter 4, there's a great scene in Revelation 4, where it unfolds what's going on in the heavens right now.

And there are millions of angels and all the saints worshipping God, praising him and saying things like this, Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.

Can you imagine the scene? All of these angels and saints praising the Lord. And I tell you, none of them, not one of them are standing there going, God's a bit full of himself getting all these praise, isn't he?

Why is that? Because they're beholding the glory of God. They see him with their own eyes. It's the most obvious thing when you see something praiseworthy to praise him. And that is exactly what they're doing.

[3:21] And I tell you, none of them are there, standing around going, I'm a bit bored of all this, actually. I'd rather be off reading a book somewhere. None of them are thinking that. All of them are having the time of their lives. Because praising the most praiseworthy thing is the most natural, fun, and obvious thing to do in all existence.

And one day, brothers and sisters, that will be our privilege with our eyes, as well as by faith. Praising God is brilliant. Now, it is also worth saying that there is false praise and true praise. True praise is something that comes from the heart. God is most praiseworthy, and true praise is something that comes from the heart. Jesus said this, and he's absolutely right, and he said this. Of people in his day, these people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. And people can praise God eloquently in church or in front of others with their lips, but not be doing it with their hearts. And God wants a people who truly worship him from their hearts. He wants a people who praise him in private as well as in public. He wants people who praise him on their knees at home as well as when they're with other people at church. God is a people who want him to love him and adore him from their hearts and to praise him.

[4 : 40] True praise is something that proceeds from the heart. Now, why is it we find praise difficult? I was thinking about this week. I don't know, why do you find praise difficult?

Let me give you a few suggestions that I was thinking of this week. Because we're English. Now, those of you who are here who are not English can have a good old laugh at us English people. Because English people, by nature, are reserved, aren't we? But that doesn't mean we can't praise God. You see, the thing about praise, as I just said a moment ago, is praise is something that comes from the heart. So actually, we can praise God in our English-reserved way, honestly and from the heart, and we're praising God.

Now, some people in some cultures, people, you know, like in football matches or whatever it is in concerts, people will be shouting and screaming, and when English people will just politely clap, that's what we do in cricket matches or something, you see.

And that's the English way. But if it's done, it's honestly from the heart, then it's good and real, honest praise and worship. And in some cultures where they're shouting and screaming, that's just what they do culturally.

[5 : 45] It might just be an outward thing and not from the heart. But likewise, in this country, we might be praising God in a reserved way, but the reason we might be doing it in a reserved way is because we're not praising him from the heart.

So when we sing in church, when we praise him in prayer, corporate prayer, or personal prayer, it doesn't matter how you do it, in a sense, as long as it proceeds from the heart and is genuine. Here's a second reason I think we find it hard to praise. Because we have too low a view of ourselves, or too low a view of God, sorry, and too high a view of other things. I think it's really easy to praise things you can see with your own eyes, isn't it?

A mountain range, or a sunset, or a newborn baby. It's easy to praise things you see with your own eyes, but difficult to praise things you can't see, like God. And also, we live in a culture which is full of praise of things that they see.

And we get swept along with the tide and just naturally adore and praise those things. Championship winning teams, or whatever it is, cars, or beauty, or fashion, or relationships.

[6 : 52] Those are the things we see and everyone else worships. Which is why it's really important that we worship God, both in church and at home, regularly.

We make it a habit that we praise God. Do you do that in your life? Is praise something you do? Because as we praise God, what we do is we kindle in our hearts an adoration, an affection, an exalted value in our God.

And when we don't praise Him in our private lives and in our public lives in church, what we will be doing is when we don't praise God, we are still praising. We just begin to praise other things in our hearts.

Whatever those things are that become most valuable to us. And as we praise with our lips and with our hearts, those things become of greater value to us. So it's really important that we practice praise even if we find it hard.

Because as we practice praise, it will raise affections in our hearts. I don't know if you find, I find this when I first get up in the morning to praise God in prayer. It's morning, I'm groggy, I find it difficult.

[7 : 58] But sometimes if I just do it, the more I do it, the longer I do it for, the more natural it becomes. I've actually got a guitar in my room as well and I sometimes get my guitar out and strum. Why not sing personal praises to God at home?

Because as we do the praise, the praise brings our heart in line to what we know in our heads is the most valuable and praiseworthy thing in all existence. But just have forgotten and wandered in our

hearts from.

The practice of praise brings our heart in line to what we know is the most valuable and praiseworthy. Well, there's some thoughts about praise. Let me encourage you, brothers and sisters, to be people who practice praise in your personal lives and in your public lives, genuinely from the heart.

The second thing I wanted to think about was thanksgiving, which is a related topic, very similar to praise. Praise and thanksgiving. The Apostle Paul would say this of us in praise.

He says this, Rejoice always, praise without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Jesus Christ.

[9 : 09] God's will for us is that we're a people who give praise and thanks in all circumstances. He says this in Colossians 3, Whatever you do, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father.

Whatever you do, wherever it is, be doing it in a thankfulness to God. We want to be a people who are filled with the Holy Spirit. He says this in Ephesians 5, Don't get drunk on wine, that's debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

Now what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? He says, Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, i.e. being filled with the Spirit as being a praised person, and giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christians are a people who give praise and thanks always. That is what it means to be filled with the Spirit. And frankly, when we look at our lives, I don't know if you find this, but we, just looking at you guys here, we're a really privileged people.

In a physical sense, most of us have everything we need, don't we? We've got all the food we need, we have homes, comfortable, like palaces, many of us. We've got so many clothes in our cupboards that we're giving them away to second-hand people all the time, second-hand clothing.

[10 : 30] We've got full fridges, many of us have got massive, fat TV, what do you call those, flat-screen TVs on our walls, dishwashers, computers, every mod com.

The amount of entertainment we have in our lives is extraordinary. We are, in a physical sense, a very privileged people. But that pales into insignificance with what we have spiritually, invisibly in God.

And so often we forget that because we want to focus on the physical. Turn with me back to Ephesians chapter 1 if you had that open. I want to show you some of the things that we have, the spiritual, invisible things that we have in Jesus Christ that we so often forget.

And please let me encourage you that if you're ever wondering what we've got, if you've got to a point in your life what do I have to thank God for? Just turn to Ephesians 1 and it reminds you of what you have.

Let me read from verse 3. Blessed be, that is praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

[11 : 42] You can't see them but they're there. We, if you are a Christian, have every spiritual, there is not a spiritual blessing that exists that you do not have in the Lord Jesus. Let me take you through them.

Verse 4. He chose us before the beginning of time. Verse 4. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we might be holy and blameless before him.

Isn't that extraordinary? Before one atom existed, God said, I want you to be my son or daughter. That's extraordinary. He chose us to be adopted.

As I just said, adoption. Verse 5. In love, he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.

According to the purpose of his will, he wanted to do it to the praise of his glorious grace with which he blessed us in the beloved.

That's Jesus. He wanted us from the beginning of time not just to be his servant but to be his children. That we might be his sons and daughters and that he's our, not just our God but our dad.

[12 : 40] That's extraordinary. He chose us for redemption. Verse 7. In him we have redemption through his blood. Each of us, if we're Christians or once enslaved to sin, we couldn't do anything about it.

But he set us free. He made us his people, his children. He gave us forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins. Verse 7. We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according

to the riches of his grace.

Brothers and sisters, you have no skeletons in your closet. No more. You're forgiven of your sins. Do you treasure that anymore? Is that something you give thanks to God for day after day?

Our consciences are washed completely clean. He's made known, he's given us insight into the future, verse 8 and 9 and 10. which he lavished upon us to give you all wisdom and insight.

He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time. He's told us what's going to happen at the end of time. He's going to unite all things in him, in Jesus, all things in heaven and on earth.

[13:48] We know that one day this world will be completely transformed. Jesus Christ will come back. The world will be renewed. There'll be no more sickness or death or dying. Everything will be without sin and everything will be united in the Lord Jesus.

How important is that that you know that? Most of the people in their beds on this road right now have no idea of the future that's coming to them. And God has told us what a privilege.

We have a guaranteed inheritance, verse 11. In him we have obtained an inheritance having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. And in verse 14 he calls it a guarantee inheritance.

We absolutely know that this wonderful future is ours. Nothing have we done to achieve that but only by his glorious grace. How much do we have thanks to God for? We have God's Holy Spirit. Well, actually we as well as that. In verse 13 when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, God brought us the gospel and then he sealed us with the promised Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

[14:57] Brothers and sisters, we have every spiritual blessing in Christ. When you stop and consider what we have, we have so much to thank God for both physically and spiritually.

So why do we find it hard to praise and particularly to thank God? Let me give you some suggestions. Some of us, we find it really hard to thank God because we've got burdens in life. Some of us feel thankless because life is really heavy. That is why interestingly Paul exhorts us to praise God and thank God in all circumstances.

He tends to write those things when he's in prison. He tends to write those things when he's facing possible execution. He tends to write those things as a single man who's unmarried and he hasn't got children if that's your burden.

He has no home. He has little food. He's got one set of clothing, the shirt on his back. His body is riddled with scars from torture and his life is constantly facing physical persecution.

[16:04] And yet he would say to you and me, rejoice always, give thanks in all circumstances. Because apart from the burdens that we have in life, and I don't want to patronise you and pretend that some of you have burdens beyond which I'll never understand.

And yet, in Jesus Christ you have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. There's nothing that you lack and your future is absolutely certain. So let me encourage you, even if you have burdens in life, turn to Ephesians chapter 1 and praise the Lord for all that you have.

That's what Paul does. That's what Paul's doing in the letter of Ephesians. A second reason we might struggle to give thanks to God, I think, is just we fall into self-sufficiency. Do you not do that? We see all the physical things we have in life, our homes, families, careers, and think that we've achieved it. We've done it all ourselves. We forget that everything that we have is a gift from God, isn't it?

And we see all the spiritual things we have in life, our faith, our church, our gifts, our service, and to be honest, we probably, in our heart of hearts, pat ourselves on the back and think that we've done those things and forget that everything that we do by faith is only because God has given us his spirit.

[17:23] So let me encourage you, brothers and sisters, don't fall into self-sufficiency. Let us be a thankful people. And the third thing is I think we just naturally value visible short-term things and not invisible or eternal things, don't we?

I think the underlying reason for all thanklessness in the Christian life, burdens in life, self-sufficiency, whatever else it is, is because we just value things that we can see and touch, but they're short-term, they're perishing, they're burning up.

We value our relationships and our careers and our clothes and our families and our homes and our social lives and our statuses and what others think of us. Those are the things that we value.

And all of these things just last days and maybe years, maybe just decades. But the things that we have in the Lord Jesus that we've just read about are ours forevermore. Forever. They never perish, spoil or fade. We have been made God's children. We've been made Jesus' wife. Relationships which will last long beyond this life.

[18 : 25] We've been made, we've been given God's spirit to be united to God, the God of the universe. And we have the power to live the most holy life, the one we all long for, that we burden for. And we have a guaranteed future with this perfect relationship, with the perfect career in the new kingdom, with the perfect family in the new kingdom.

With the perfect home in the new kingdom. With the perfect social life in the new kingdom. With the ultimate status and the ultimate accolade of all, on all because of God's grace to us. The riches of his grace. He described it there in verse 7, didn't he? The riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. So whatever our physical circumstances, whatever our situation, however good it is or however bad it is, let us be a people who in our prayer lives give praise to God and give thanks to God.

Let me finish with an illustration. I was writing this very talk in Café Nira in East Dulwich this week and I was actually, my heart was full of joy actually because it's a wonderful thing to meditate on. This is a great job. And an old lady came and sat next to me and she was one of these old ladies who makes it her goal in life to moan about everything.

[19 : 43] It was raining outside so she had a natural starting point and she just turned to me and said, oh, miserable weather outside. Now at this point I'm very excited by what I've been thinking about so I think I'll deflect her from this moan.

So what I'll say to her is this. I'll say, well yeah it is raining outside but do you know what? We could be flooded outside. We could be flooded, couldn't we? Things could be worse, couldn't they? At which point she decided to vicariously take on the moans of the rest of the world.

Yeah, yeah, in Thailand there's been all these floods and all these people and there was an earthquake and da-da-da-da and on and on and on she went. It's almost anything I said that was positive.

She took and turned it into a moan. Now there are people probably in your offices, in your families, in the schools, in your neighbourhood who just love to moan.

It's an English disease. But as Christians we are not like that. We are different. We are not moaners. We have a great God who is worthy of all praise, who is our Father whom we can praise for the rest of forever.

[20 : 44] And he has given us the riches of his grace. We have so much to thank him for. So let me encourage you brothers and sisters, just in case you've got out of the habit of doing this or find it hard to do this, let us be a people in church and in our private prayer lives at home to be a people who knee-jerk into praise and thanksgiving.

Hallowed be your names. The first line of the Lord's Prayer we prayed a moment ago. Let us be a people who knee-jerk to praise and thanksgiving of our great God. Let's pray, shall we, as we finish. Father God, to honour you and to praise you as that man did as we heard at the very beginning is just a wonderful thing. You are such a great God.

We cannot see you but we know you reign in resplendent glory. You are the only one who sees and knows all things. You are the perfect judge in righteousness of all that goes on.

You are the God of unparalleled mercy and forgiveness and even though we cannot see you we know and see all of the things you made from the greatest star to the smallest ant.

[21 : 58] You are the great God, the great God above all gods. There is no God like you and why, oh Lord, great God of the heavens have you looked down upon us, us grasshoppers as you must see us and have you lavished upon us the greatest treasures, the greatest riches.

We lack nothing. We look at our lives and the things that you've given us materially and the people that we know and love that you've given to us, our health, our intellect, our homes, our relationships, we are overflowing with blessing, physical blessing.

Thank you so much and yet the great treasures that you've given us in the Lord Jesus, spiritual things, our adoption as sons and making you our father so we can know you, our forgiveness, the redemption that you've given to us, saving us from the wicked ways that we lived, the inheritance that we have coming to us, the joy of eternity and the spirit that you've given us now guaranteeing that eternal future.

Father, we lack nothing. So whatever our circumstances, be they good or bad, high or low, whether we are well fed or in need, Father, we want to give you unadulterated praise and thanksgiving for all that you have given us, longing for the day when we'll see you with our own eyes.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[23 : 29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Ephraim Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Please be uma amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Years.