



2 Samuel 6:12-23, Psalm 150

Last week we started a new series exploring what sort of church we should be if we are to see God's kingdom be built up here. I'm using the song we sang this morning "For I'm building a people of power – and we looked at how we as the church of God are people of power. Today we move on to the next one.

One of the things we are looking forward to as the weather gets better is going as a family to Foxhall Stadium to see the Banger and Stock Car racing. It's quite an evening of sights and sounds and it's fun to watch the cars racing around a narrow track and usually ending up in pile-ups! It's fun to watch but not something most of us would probably like to actually do! In fact, they have to be very careful about safety and there are high crash barriers and tyre walls as well as steel cages to stop people getting on the track.

There are of course other sports. I just don't understand why people watch crown green bowls. It's about as interesting as watching tea cool to be a spectator. But if you play, it's an interesting pastime – it's not a sport for spectators.

Someone said once that the Christian faith is not a spectator sport – it's life and it has to be lived. It's a relationship between ourselves and the living God – and right at the heart of being the people of God is that we are a people of praise – we praise God. For I'm building a people of power and I'm making a people of praise.

What is praise? That's quite simple at any level. It's telling someone just how good they are. There's even an English expression – we sing someone's praises. Praising is invariably verbal and designed to encourage, uplift, show love, show respect and show appreciation. "Didn't they do well!" If you looked at any of the Champions' League matches this week what you will have heard from Anfield or Old Trafford was the crowd cheering and singing for their team. When they were doing badly, they cheered to lift them and when they were winning, they did it even louder. It's a natural human reaction. We are people who naturally praise because we identify with whom we are praising. They may be spectators, but they make themselves part of the action by cheering and singing!

In fact, you can't credibly shout, cheer or sing the praise of anyone you're not committed to or think that they rubbish and not worth respect. Try going to a match between Colchester United and West Bromwich Albion when you're an Ipswich Town Supporter. You might enjoy whatever good aspects of the game that you may see, but you won't cheer either of them probably because they are not the team that you support so you won't be shouting and singing – perhaps a polite clap!.

But when it comes to the things of God we aren't dealing with trivial stuff. God has made an amazing creation. He has shown His love. He has rescued us eternally. He is a God who doesn't just deserve a little bit of praise - but a huge amount of it and more. He's worthy of all our praise!

In fact, people most associate praise with worship – and by praise they usually mean singing. Praise in song is one way of expressing God's worth but there are many ways of praising God and I'll touch on that in a moment. Worship is more than just praise though. Worship is the way we express to God and to others what He is worth to us (worth-ship). And that doesn't just involve words, but the whole way that we live and act as Christians – maybe more on that another time. Living your faith is more costly and more meaningful than just saying words and singing songs – but expressing

praise is a start and the foundation of worship.

So why is it that when many Christians come to the things of God that they are less than enthusiastic about meeting with God? Surely we are the people of God. We want to praise God don't we? So why do so many Christians in this country have more hang-ups than the cloakroom at the Albert Hall?

Let me take you to another part of the world and to some people who are getting their first exposure to the things of God. This I think is a true story called Resurrection and Pandemonium.

Imagine the mystery and delight of not just hearing, but seeing the story of Jesus for the first time, almost as an eyewitness. That's what happened to a tribe in the jungles of East Asia when missionaries showed them the Jesus film. Not only had these people never heard of Jesus, they had never seen a motion picture. Then, all at once, on one unforgettable evening, they saw it all—the gospel in their own language, visible and real.

Imagine again how it felt to see this good man, Jesus—who healed the sick and was adored by children—held without trial and beaten by jeering soldiers. As they watched this, the people came unglued. They stood up and began to shout at the cruel men on the screen, demanding that this outrage stop. When nothing happened, they attacked the missionary running the projector. Perhaps he was responsible for this injustice! He was forced to stop the film and explain that the story wasn't over yet, that there was more. So they settled back onto the ground, holding their emotions in tenuous check.

Then came the crucifixion. Again, the people could not hold back. They began to weep and wail with such loud grief that once again the film had to be stopped. The missionary again tried to calm them, explaining that the story still wasn't over, that there was more. So they composed themselves and sat down to see what happened next.

Then came the resurrection. Pandemonium broke out this time, but for a different reason. The gathering had spontaneously erupted into a party. The noise now was of jubilation, and it was deafening. The people were dancing and slapping each other on the back. Christ is risen, indeed!

Again, the missionary had to shut off the projector. But this time he didn't tell them to calm down and wait for what was next. All that was supposed to happen—in the story and in their lives—was happening.

Ben Patterson, "Resurrection and Pandemonium," Leadership Journal

How do we respond to the wonderful truths of the gospel – with feeling – or a “that again” attitude. But when we look at the greatness of God, the love of God, the grace of God and just what He has made us – He's worthy of all our praise. In fact in the OT people went to inordinate lengths to make sure God got all the praise He deserved. We read Psalm 150 earlier – it's just a catalogue of praise from beginning to end. But even in darker psalms, we usually get that acceptance that even in the most difficult of times God deserves our worship. Look at this one for example.

Ps 71:1 LORD, I have come to you for protection; never let me be defeated! 2 Because you are righteous, help me and rescue me. Listen to me and save me! 3 Be my secure shelter and a strong fortress to protect me; you are my refuge and defence. 4 My God, rescue me from wicked people, from the power of cruel and evil people. 5 Sovereign LORD, I put my hope in you ; I have trusted in you since I was young. 6 I have relied on you all my life; you have protected me since the day I was born. I will always praise you . 7 My life has been an example to many, because you have been my strong defender. 8 All day long I praise you and proclaim your glory.

Here's a man recognising that in all the threats he was facing, God was always there and an overcomer. The threats were still there, the problems in life was still there – but this is a psalm of hope, recognising that God was bigger than his problems.

Look at these verses from Isaiah 61. They were words that Jesus attributed to Himself.

Is 61:1 (C) The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 (C) to proclaim the year of the

Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 (C) and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

And what does He do – He's the Saviour who changes all the minuses to pluses. I like the final bit – He gives us a garment of praise – as we praise, we get things into perspective and despair turns to joy. Let me give you a bit of the NT to give us some perspective.

Rom 8:17 Since we are his children, we will possess the blessings he keeps for his people, and we will also possess with Christ what God has kept for him; for if we share Christ's suffering, we will also share his glory. 18 I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

This evening I'm going to look at the notion that we praise God in whatever circumstances. Why? Because whatever the problems we have; they're nothing compared to who God is and where we are going as His people. He puts life into perspective - *I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.* God wants us to be passionate about all the good things He has in store for us and in all the blessings He's already given to us.

Larry Crabb said, *"The core problem is not that we are too passionate about bad things, but that we are not passionate enough about good things."*

So this morning, we are going to look at praise from the perspective of the two characters in our story: David and Michal. It was a great day for the people of Israel. The Ark of the Covenant was being brought into Jerusalem from the house of Obed-Edom. It was a day of great rejoicing and David led it. It was an exciting time and David really got stuck into worship. A true participant. Michal, his wife was a true spectator here.. There's quite a convoluted history to her which again is probably for another time. She there at the window, like a good twitcher, staring out on the crowds, not taking part but critically watching David. There's a question we might want to ask ourselves this morning – are we Dancing Dave or Miserable Michal.

There's a lot we can learn about what it means to praise God from these two. *The first lesson is - desire the blessing of God that His blessing might flow through us.* David realised that God wanted to bless His people and desired to worship Him as the Ark was brought into Jerusalem, and as king He wanted to lead his people in these celebrations towards God. And down the passage we see him taking that lead – by donning an ephod, usually worn by priests, leading the Ark in, sacrificing before it, blessing the people and blessing his own household. He wanted to honour God in what he was doing. He didn't seem to be interested in blessings for himself – he was already king – but he used his position to bless others.

What are we doing here this morning? What have we come for? Why are we doing it? Praise isn't about me – it's about others. David worshipped to serve. Now that's something we often don't think about. We come to get our batteries recharged, to enjoy the presence of God. But David didn't just enjoy the presence of God as he praised, he used the blessings of God through it to bless others.

We know when we have truly worshipped. We feel the touch of God – and touch others with it. Praise is infectious and it encourages others as well as honours God. Let's pray that God will infect us with it as we open our hearts to Him in praise.

The second lesson we learn from David is - *don't worry about what anyone else thinks* - the only thing that matters is whether you are worshipping with all your might before the Lord - we have an audience of ONE. Frankly, Michal was right in one respect – David made a complete exhibition of himself. And do you know what – David didn't care because he knew where his heart was and his reply was *21 "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel--I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes.* If it honours God then I don't care what other people think.

That's a profound thought and we'll consider it with point 3 which is:

The third lesson is - *worship God with all your might, and don't judge others for the ways they express their devotion.* Michal the miserable didn't see the blessing of God coming in the shape of

the Ark – all she could see is her husband making what she thought was a fool of himself in front of “inferior” people. Every church has Michals – people who sit and lurk and pass judgement. In worship more than in any other aspect of the ministry of the church does the spirit of Michal predominate.

One of the dominant features of many forms of worship in Western churches has been the reserved way in which many people praise God. It seems to come from two notions. First of all from the idea that God is king and we must reverence Him. But God is father and that gives us the right balance of familiarity with reverence as God requires it. And the second is British reserve. It just isn't, well, cricket to shout and make lots of undignified noise. So we do things reverently.

But look at scripture. What sort of king is Jesus? Is He sombre and solemn – or the one who leads His people in praise, dancing down the streets? If you look at praise in the OT it was never sombre or solemn. “Shout to the Lord” was common, so was loud music, drums, cymbals, processions, people waving the hands and other objects, dancing, singing loudly, reading scripture and the rest. Praise is meant to be exciting because God is exciting. It's scriptural and it's natural. When was the last time you saw a football match and everyone was standing or sitting in respectful silence, or politely clapping. No, they are a football crowd – they cheer, they wave their hands in the air, they shout, they sing. What a pity people get exciting at Portman Road but they don't feel that they can do that in God's house – even though He is worthy of much more praise than just a football team.

Don't be afraid to praise God. Don't be afraid to embrace new things to honour your audience of One and bless others as a result of doing so.

This passage is about respect. Michal didn't respect David. When we praise, we need to do it with all our heart to our audience of One as David did.

If that is so, whether we are reserved or lively, we don't stand in judgement. Michal stands as a warning. The passage simply says that Michal never had children – she was barren. There is no believer more barren than one who sits in judgement over others. Some of the sourest Christian people I've ever met are those who are more bothered how other people worship that they never worship themselves. And they have been so barren spiritually,

Are we Dancing David or Miserable Michal. If we've been Michal then we need to ask forgiveness. If we've been guilty about the way we worship – or a bit reserved because we are afraid of what others think, then we must remember who is our audience. Look at scripture and give God glory – because there are plenty of ways we can do that – many we've never tried – and that's been our loss.

Let me finish with this quote which sums it all up: *when the truth is truly alive in your heart, you will avoid being a worship spectator and celebrate before the Lord.*

Prayer

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Scripture Quotes TEV and NIV*