



2 Chronicles 20:15-21, Exodus 34:11-14

We saw this morning how we are a people of praise. Praise is a response to that we see coming from others that's worthy of an affirmation, an encouragement, and expression of love or an expression of devotion. In our faith praise is mostly what comes out of our mouths but we saw this morning how in the Old Testament that people used what was at their disposal to praise God and how praising God not only blesses us, but is something that we seek to bless others with. I guess I could easily do a series on this subject, but I'll suffice at this stage by stressing its importance.

Whereas we give praise to an audience of one, praise is something that is effective in a corporate sense and it's that element which I want to focus on this evening. What I want to focus on is the fact that praise is not something that is passive, but is something essential if the work of God is to go forward in this place.

When God's people praise, things happen. We should expect that. We saw that in our story tonight. I'll come to that in a minute. Praise is something that can and should God into perspective. Remember the verse in Romans 8: *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.* That's an amazing verse. With all the difficulties and pressures of life we need to remember our eternal promises and that's enough to praise God whatever the situation. But Paul encourages us even more in *Philippians 4:4 May you always be joyful in your union with the Lord. I say it again: rejoice! 5 Show a gentle attitude toward everyone. The Lord is coming soon. 6 Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. 7 And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus.*

Rejoice in the Lord always. Always. What's interesting is how this works with all the worries of life. Verse 6 says: *6 Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart.* Don't worry – ask God for what you need – with a thankful heart. How can you be thankful when you haven't received yet? Because we are a worshipping people and we go before a God and praise One who never holds back on a people who praise Him. Praise gives us an approach to God that's confident and powerful. Praise wins battles before we've fought them. We saw that in Psalm 71, we see that in the NT and we certainly saw that in our reading tonight.

So here's King Jehoshaphat and he's honest towards God about his enemies – rather like Psalm 71. Here's what he was told: The battle depends on God, not on you. *16 Attack them tomorrow as they come up the pass at Ziz. You will meet them at the end of the valley that leads to the wild country near Jeruel. 17 You will not have to fight this battle. Just take up your positions and wait; you will see the LORD give you victory. But there's more – the people marched out as if they had won the battle – that was their faith and they praised God as they marched out for the victory they did not yet see. The rest as they say is history: 21 After consulting with the people, the king ordered some musicians to put on the robes they wore on sacred occasions and to march ahead of the army, singing: "Praise the LORD! His love is eternal!" 22 When they began to sing, the LORD threw the invading armies into a panic.*

We may not be asked to fight battles like this, we are still faced with the battles of life but even more so, we are faced with a spiritual battle – *Eph 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's*

schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. How on earth do we fight against powers we know little about? By putting on the right armour, by selecting the right weapons and by contacting HQ – but also by realising that the battle belongs to the Lord.

2Cor 10:3 (NIV) For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

What we need to realise if we want to build the kingdom here in Felixstowe is that it just isn't a case of finding a few committed people, using the right training and evangelism techniques and all that. Those things are important. We are not dealing with just people and trying to persuade people – but we enter a spiritual war zone and Satan will try to do everything to stop us. We counter him by using that God has given us and walk in the confidence of the power of God as the people of Judah did. We need to do battle in the spiritual realm too and believe that the battle belongs to the Lord. And praising God is a fundamental part of that spiritual warfare.

In our story, they gave thanks to God for the blessings they did not yet see and the enemy was delivered into their hands. When – when they prayed and thanked God for the victory. So we want to see the church grow and God's kingdom extended. Take a leaf or two from this passage. Jehoshaphat prayed – he prayed honestly because he was at a loss. Then he listened to God, obeyed and praised expectantly.

These are pointers for us:

- ➔ **Pray** – give the problem to God. Look at what Jehoshaphat did: *3 Jehoshaphat was frightened and prayed to the LORD for guidance. Then he gave orders for a fast to be observed throughout the country. 4 From every city of Judah people hurried to Jerusalem to ask the LORD for guidance, 5 and they and the people of Jerusalem gathered in the new courtyard of the Temple. King Jehoshaphat went and stood before them 6 and prayed aloud.* Prayed, fasted, gathered together, corporately prayed.

Do we want the blessing – then we should start in prayer and mean business and also do it all corporately. Look carefully at this prayer – it's full of the promises of God. Why am I hot on God's promises? God doesn't need reminding of them – but we do! Do we want to see God's kingdom extended – we have to pray!

- ➔ **Obey** - when we mean business in prayer God answers. It wasn't quite what they expected I think. They were called to get people together and march out to meet the enemy. When we are serious in prayer – the answer is also clear and decisive. It may take us a bit to get there. For Jehoshaphat it was a prophecy.

Er - I don't think that's what they were quite expecting. They just couldn't win because the enemy was too numerous and strong. But they obeyed. One of the most important things about discerning the will of God as we meet to pray is that we must learn to listen the the voice of God and that often means we don't get to see the miracle straight off – but we get a faith challenge instead. These people had just that and it was tough for them. You want this church to grow? Are you ready to pray? Then be ready for a faith challenge. Do we want to see God's kingdom extended – we have to obey!

- ➔ **Praise** – so they go out for battle and instead of getting ready to fight, they go out praising as victors – exalting God - *"Praise the LORD! His love is eternal!"* You'll notice that nothing happened until the people discerned the voice of God. How strange it is that so often we do things the other way around! But they didn't forget about God and get on with the battle – they recognised that the battle was the Lord's. Do we want to see God's kingdom extended – we have to praise!

This isn't just an OT thing. Remember Paul and Silas banged up in prison in Philippi. What were they doing at midnight when the earthquake came and the prison was opened up miraculously – they were praising God! We pray, we obey, we praise! POP!

In the end, if we want to see the kingdom extended, we've got to enter the battlefield. We extend His kingdom knowing that in doing so the true battle is spiritual, not just merely doing a few evangelistic things or serving God more effectively. His kingdom is not extended until we march in praise. Growing churches don't just have a good prayer life, but they develop a good praise life because at all time the battle is the Lord's .

I believe that if we are to be and to do for others what God means us to be and to do, we must not let Adoration and Worship slip into second place, "For it is the central service asked by God of human souls; and its neglect is responsible for much lack of spiritual depth and power."

*Perhaps we may find here the reason why we so often run dry. We do not give time enough to what makes for depth, and so we are shallow; a wind, quite a little wind, can ruffle our surface; a little hot sun, and all the moisture in us evaporates. It should not be so.
-Amy Carmichael in "Edges of His Ways"*

So praise is dynamic. Why is it so dynamic? John Piper puts it this way:

The Holy Spirit is our great hope against Satan. But how does the Holy Spirit fill and empower us? Ephesians 5:18–19 says, "Be filled with the Holy Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody to the Lord with all your heart." The fullness of the Holy Spirit is experienced as a heart filled with singing. So if we fight Satan by the fullness of the Spirit, we fight him with song.

Someone said, "Satan is allergic to praise, so that wherever there is massive, triumphant praise, he is paralysed, bound, and banished."

What I think I am saying here is to see that praise is an important part of moving forward as a church – as much as prayer is. Let me give you a current day testimony.

Worship brings about the victory. The shock-rocker and self-proclaimed priest of the Church of Satan, Marilyn Manson, was scheduled for a concert in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on April 28. This brought about a great uproar from the community, because his music was linked the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado. Law enforcement prepared for an ugly scene.

Then a group of pastors, youth pastors, and other believers got together and organized prayer-and-praise services before and during the concert. Through the power of worship, these Christians decided to bless, not curse, the concert goers. They passed out over one hundred pizzas and twelve hundred soft drinks in the parking lot. They paid for the parking for many. "Many Manson fans showed a 'This does not compute' look as they scratched their heads in bewilderment." The results? Manson became so outraged, he destroyed his Nazi/antichrist set and stormed off the stage very early in the show, vowing never to return. At least three people came to faith in Christ. Worship is an incredibly powerful weapon in spiritual warfare.

We are celebrating 200 years in a few weeks. God. It's wonderful to look at the past and see the blessings of the past. But we worship Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. We enter year 201 and into a future where we need to discern God's way. We do so in a town where the church has contracted, our church had contracted, where witness to people in our society is difficult. We need to become people of prayer in a way we are not familiar with at the moment to discern God's way. But we also need to recognise we have a spiritual battle to fight if we are to win these people. For that we need to become even more so, people of praise. The battle is the lord's – praise Him!

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