

SERMON"PRAISE GOD"

GOOD MORNING. WHEN PASTOR DALE ASKED ME IF I WOULD DO THE SERMON ON THE 24TH OF SEPTEMBER, I SAID SURE! I DO A LOT OF PUBLIC SPEAKING IN MY JOB FOR THE ARMY SO I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A SNAP. AS I BEGAN PREPARING I FOUND OUT TWO VERY IMPORTANT THINGS. FIRST, WHEN I SPEAK AS PART OF MY JOB I AM THE EXPERT AND REALLY ARE NOT VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT THE AUDIENCE REACTIONS ARE TO THE FACTS I AM PROVIDING. FOR THIS SITUATION I AM CLEARLY NOT THE EXPERT AND I CARE VERY DEEPLY ABOUT THE REACTIONS OF MY CHURCH FAMILY --- NO PRESSURE. SECOND, THE MORE I RESEARCHED THE MORE I DISCOVERED THE "MYSTERIES OF FAITH." EVERY THING HAS LAYERS OF MEANINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS. I STARTED GETTING CONFUSED MYSELF OVER WHAT I SHOULD SAY. I PRAYED FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT TO ENTER MY BODY AND TAKE CONTROL OF MY HANDS TO TYPE OUT THIS SERMON. APPARENTLY THE HOLY SPIRIT HAD BIGGER FISH TO FRY ON TUESDAY SO I WAS LEFT TO MY OWN DEVICES. ALTHOUGH TO BE HONEST WITH YOU I DID FEEL SOME INSPIRATION AS I STARTED TO FOCUS ON WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY. MY WIFE PROVIDED SOME OF THAT INSPIRATION BY TELLING ME SHE WAS DEBATING WHETHER OR NOT TO ATTEND, APPARENTLY I HAVE A BIT OF A REPUTATION FOR NOT KNOWING WHEN TO BE QUIET...GO FIGURE.

SO WHAT AM I GOING TO TALK ABOUT TODAY? I HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THIS FOR QUITE A WHILE. I HAVE TO CONFESS THAT I SOMETIMES HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT MY FAITH. I REALLY WANT TO COMPLETELY SURRENDER TO JESUS CHRIST AND WHOLEHEARTEDLY ACCEPT HIS GIFT OF SALVATION AND ALWAYS DO THE CHRISTIAN THING, LOVE MY NEIGHBOR AS I LOVE MYSELF AND OBEY THE LORDS COMMANDS. BUT I FIND MYSELF QUESTIONING WHAT ALL OF THE ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIANITY MEAN IN PRACTICE RATHER THAN JUST WORDS. MY LATEST FASCINATION IS THE PHRASE- "PRAISE GOD."

WE HEAR THOSE WORDS OFTEN WHEN GOOD THINGS HAPPEN- BUT WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN? IF ONE ACCEPTS GOD IS OMNIPOTENT, SEES ALL, KNOWS ALL: FOR "HIM" TIME IS IRRELEVANT THEN WHY WOULD HE COMMAND US TO PRAISE HIM OVER 250 TIMES IN THE BIBLE? THINK ABOUT IT. WE ARE ALL SINNERS SEEKING REDEMPTION THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST. EVERY DAY WE FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD (ROMANS 3:23) [Ecclesiastes 7:20](#) "INDEED, THERE IS NOT A RIGHTEOUS MAN ON EARTH WHO CONTINUALLY DOES GOOD AND WHO NEVER SINS." SO WHY WOULD GOD WANT PRAISE FROM THOSE WHO ARE BEGGING FOR HIS FORGIVENESS? I ASK THESE QUESTIONS BECAUSE I WAS TROUBLED BY THE SEEMING INCONGRUITY OF BEING COMMANDED TO PRAISE THE LORD AND WONDERING IF I WAS EVEN WORTHY TO OFFER MY PRAISE TO THE ALMIGHTY. WHY WOULD THE LORD CARE ABOUT MY PRAISE?

IT WAS WITH THOSE THOUGHTS THAT I EMBARKED ON MY RESEARCH TO UNDERSTAND WHAT PRAISING GOD MEANS AND HOW I COULD BE WORTHY TO OBEY THE COMMAND TO PRAISE LORD.

SO WHY DOES GOD WANT US TO PRAISE HIM? IN OUR HUMAN AND CYNICAL MINDS ACCUSTOMED TO HUMAN FAILINGS DO WE WONDER IF GOD HAS AN EGO? DOES OUR PRAISE MAKE GOD FEEL MORE IMPORTANT? OF COURSE NOT! GOD IS OMNIPOTENT, HE IS THE ALL IN ALL, HE COMMANDS US TO PRAISE HIM, NOT FOR HIM BUT FOR US!

A CHRISTIAN DEFINITION OF PRAISE IS "JOYFUL THANKING AND ADORATION OF GOD, THE CELEBRATION OF GOODNESS AND HIS GRACE."

-SO WHY IS JOYFUL THANKING IMPORTANT TO US? THERE IS AMPLE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT GRATITUDE IS AN INCREDIBLY HEALTHY ACTIVITY. BEING GRATEFUL HELPS BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND WHAT RELATIONSHIP IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN A CHRISTIANS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? GRATITUDE BUILDS PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH, IT REDUCES TOXIC EMOTIONS LIKE ENVY, RESENTMENT AND REGRET. GRATITUDE INCREASES EMPATHY AND REDUCES AGGRESSION. THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT WHEN A PERSON FEELS GRATITUDE IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO HARBOR NEGATIVE EMOTIONS! WOW - SEEMS LIKE GODS COMMAND TO PRAISE HIM AND EXPRESS GRATITUDE FOR HIS PART IN OUR LIVES LEADS US TO THE PLACES WHERE HE WANTS US TO BE - HEALTHIER, HAPPIER AND IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

- **PRAISING GOD ALSO GIVES US PERSPECTIVE.** WHEN OUR TROUBLES ABOUND, REMEMBERING THAT GOD HAS THE POWER TO PULL US THROUGH THE TROUBLES IS REASSURING AND COMFORTING. THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF HIS GLORY AND POWER PROVIDES A STABLE FOUNDATION TO ENDURE. ROMANS CHAPTER 5 VERSE 4 AND 5 "WE ALSO REJOICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS, BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT SUFFERING PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE; PERSEVERANCE, CHARACTER; AND CHARACTER, HOPE. 5AND HOPE DOES NOT DISAPPOINT US, BECAUSE GOD HAS Poured OUT HIS LOVE INTO OUR HEARTS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT, WHOM HE HAS GIVEN US" PRAISING GOD CAN GIVE US THE STRENGTH TO ENDURE.

- **PRAISING GOD ALSO HELPS US UNDERSTAND HIS CHARACTERISTICS.**

THE VERY SPECIAL ASPECTS OF GOD ARE IMPORTANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE, BY COMTEMPLATING ALL OF GOD'S ADMIRABLE QUALITIES IT PUSHES US TO IMPROVE OUR RELATIONSHIP BY THANKING GOD AND IMITATING GOD TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITIES. PRAISING GOD MAKES US WANT TO BE MORE LIKE HIM. HE WANTS US TO BE HIS CHILDREN THINKING AND STRIVING TO ACT AS HE DOES.

SO PRAISING GOD HELPS US BY INSPIRING GRATITUDE, GIVING PERSPECTIVE, AND STRIVING TO BE MORE LIKE GOD AS DEMONSTRATED TO US THROUGH THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST.

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY ABOUT A VERY DEAR FRIEND OF MINE. MAXIE AND I MET AS CAPTAINS AND THROUGHOUT OUR MILITARY CAREERS WE KEPT IN TOUCH. WHEN I RETIRED HE HIRED ME INTO THE JOB I HAVE

NOW. IN 2010 MAXIE LEFT GOVERNMENT SERVICE AND LATER THAT YEAR WAS DIAGNOSED WITH CHONDRO-SARCOMA, A VERY AGGRESSIVE CANCER. I VISITED WITH MAXIE IN HOUSTON AT THE MD ANDERSON CANCER HOSPITAL. MAXIE WAS UNDERGOING A NUMBER OF MEDICAL TRIALS HOPING FOR REMISSION. HE HAD HAD HIS LEG AMPUTATED AT THE HIP JOINT IN AN ATTEMPT TO SLOW THE SPREAD. WHEN I SAW MAXIE THE FIRST THING HE ASKED IS FOR ME TO PRAY WITH HIM. MAXIE THANKED GOD FOR ME BEING THERE AND FOR MANY THINGS IN HIS LIFE. HE PRAISED GOD'S WISDOM AND ASKED ONLY THAT WHATEVER THE PLAN WAS THAT HE WOULD GET ON WITH IT. MAXIE TURNED TO ME AND STARTED ASKING ME ABOUT MY HEALTH AND MY FAMILY. AS I LOOKED INTO HIS EYES I SAW A PEACE AND CONNECTION TO GOD THAT WAS EXTRAORDINARY. IN HIS ILLNESS HE STILL PRAISED GOD BY THANKS AND ADORATION. I COULD SEE MAXIE GROW MORE "CHRIST-LIKE" THROUGH PRAISE AND PRAYER. MAXIE HAD GRATITUDE, PERSPECTIVE, AND WAS EMULATING GOD THE FATHER.

THIS LEADS ME TO HOW WE CAN PRAISE GOD. PRAISING GOD HAS TO BE A CONSCIOUS ACTIVITY! IT HAS TO BE MORE THAN WORDS OR BODY MOTIONS = YOU MUST ENGAGE YOUR SPIRIT AND FEEL IT IN YOUR HEART. THE PRIMARY HEBREW ROOT WORD FOR PRAISE IS "HALLAL." HALLAL MEANS "TO BE CLEAR, TO PRAISE, TO SHINE, TO RAVE, TO CELEBRATE." IT IS AN ACTIVE WORD, REQUIRING COMMITMENT. OUR WORD HALLELUJAH IS DRAWN FROM HEBREW "PRAISE GOD". WE PRAISE GOD BY

THOUGHTFULLY EXTOLLING HIS GOODNESS, HIS GREATNESS, HIS MAJESTY, HIS LOVE, AND HIS MIGHTY DEEDS ON OUR BEHALF.

THE MERE SAYING OR SINGING OF "PRAISE THE LORD" OR "HALLELUJAH" IS NOT PRAISE. PRAISE IS A CONSCIOUS ADMIRATION, ADORATION AND GRATITUDE EXPRESSED FROM THE HEART.

AN ANALOGY MIGHT HELP. LET'S CONSIDER HUMAN PRAISE. IMAGINE A HUMAN FATHER WHO'S SON COMES UP TO HIM AND SAYS "PRAISE DAD". WHAT WOULD BE THE FATHER'S REACTION? SOME MIGHT CONSIDER THERAPY OR PERHAPS AN OVERNIGHT STAY AT PSYCHIATRIC FACILITY FOR OBSERVATION. BUT IF THE SON SAYS, "DAD, YOU ARE A MAN OF LOVE AND COMPASSION" IT PUTS SOME CONTEXT INTO THE PRAISE.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO TO PRAISE GOD?

FIRST, WE CAN MEDITATE AND STUDY ON PRAISE. THE BIBLE IS FILLED WITH EXAMPLES. THE SCRIPTURE READING FOR TODAY PROVIDES A GREAT START POINT FOR STUDY. THERE ARE MANY MORE SCRIPTURES THAT ALSO PROVIDE INSIGHTS ON PRAISE.

SECOND, WE CAN PRAY WITH PRAISE. PRAYER AND PRAISE ARE THE TWO WINGS THAT ALLOW US TO REALIZE THE PROMISE IN ISAIAH CHAPTER 40:31 TO "SOAR LIKE EAGLES." PRAYING WITH PRAISE ALLOWS US TO START WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF ALL GOD HAS DONE FOR US, THE WONDERS OF HIS CREATIONS, AND BEAUTY OF HIS PLAN FOR US. IT STARTS THE PRAYER WITH GRATITUDE AND ALLOWS PERSPECTIVE ON THE REQUESTS THAT MOST PRAYERS CONTAIN. PRAISE IS A NECESSARY ACT OF WORSHIP.

THIRD PRAISE IN SONG. THIS IS A CHALLENGE FOR MANY OF US. SOME PEOPLE ARE NOT BLESSED WITH A MELODIOUS VOICE OR AN EAR FOR RHYTHM. DO NOT BE ASHAMED! GOD TRULY UNDERSTANDS AND THE ATTEMPT IS MUSIC TO HIS EARS - IF YOU CANNOT SING ITS OK. DO WHAT YOU CAN. PAUL SAID IN HIS LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS; BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT, ¹⁹ SPEAKING TO ONE ANOTHER WITH PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SONGS FROM THE SPIRIT. SING AND MAKE MUSIC FROM YOUR HEART TO THE LORD, ²⁰ ALWAYS GIVING THANKS TO GOD THE FATHER FOR EVERYTHING, IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

FINALLY - WHEN SHOULD YOU PRAISE GOD? IT IS EASY ENOUGH WHEN SOMETHING GOOD HAPPENS, PRAISE MAY EVEN BE MORE NECESSARY WHEN TIMES ARE BAD OR THINGS GO WRONG. REMEMBER GRATITUDE, PERSPECTIVE, AND EMULATION. PRAISE GOD FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE PERSERVANCE, BUILD CHARACTER AND LEAD TO UNDYING HOPE THROUGH FAITH.

I WANT TO END WITH SOME THOUGHTS FROM C.S. LEWIS, ONE OF MY FAVORITE AUTHORS ON FAITH AND CHRISTIANITY. IF YOU HAVE NOT READ HIS SEMINAL WORK "MERE CHRISTIANITY" YOU SHOULD. HE WAS AN ATHEIST AND BECAME A CHRISTIAN EXPOUSING THE LOGIC IN THIS BOOK. WHAT HE SAID ABOUT PRAISE:

"I THINK WE DELIGHT TO PRAISE WHAT WE ENJOY BECAUSE THE PRAISE NOT ONLY EXPRESSES BUT COMPLETES THE ENJOYMENT, IT IS ITS APPOINTED CONSUMMATION. IF IT WERE POSSIBLE FOR A CREATED SOUL TO FULLY APPRECIATE -THAT IS TO LOVE AND DELIGHT IN THE WORTHIEST OBJECT OF ALL, AND SIMULTANEOUSLY AT EVERY MOMENT TO GIVE THIS DELIGHT PERFECT EXPRESSION THEN THAT SOUL WOULD BE IN SUPREME BLESSEDNESS. TO PRAISE GOD FULLY WE MUST SUPPOSE OURSELVES TO BE IN PERFECT LOVE WITH GOD, DROWNED IN, DISSOLVED BY THAT DELIGHT, WHICH FAR FROM REMAINING PENT UP WITHIN OURSELVES AS INCOMMUNICABLE BLISS, FLOWS OUT FROM US INCESSANTLY AGAIN IN EFFORTLESS AND PERFECT EXPRESSION. OUR JOY IS NO MORE SEPARABLE FROM THE PRAISE IN WHICH IT LIBERATES AND UTTERS ITSELF THAN THE BRIGHTNESS A MIRROR RECEIVES IS SEPARABLE FROM THE BRIGHTNESS IT RECEIVES."

THANK YOU ALL FOR COMING WITH ME ON MY JOURNEY AS I EXPLORED PRAISING GOD. I APPRECIATE YOUR PATIENCE TODAY. THANK YOU GOD FOR GIVING ME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS WITH MY CHURCH FAMILY.

(Isaiah 40:31 International Version (NIV))

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD

will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;

they will run and not grow weary,

they will walk and not be faint)