

Praise: The Unsung Hero

Introduction

Praise is one of the things in church life that is often misunderstood and undervalued. Many times a person will attend service, looking at the initial praise and worship session as an opportunity to play around a little bit, do a little feel-good dance, or even use it as a “grace” period for lateness, all the time not acknowledging how important it really is, nor how deep its purpose runs in establishing and empowering the spirit inside. Though often underrated, praise is one of the most valuable components to living a faithful, powerful, holy Christian life that exudes the example of Christ to non-believers. Some specific categories, or rather aspects, that exemplify the glorious magnitude of praise include: Praise as a Self Motivator, Praise as a Weapon, Praise as a Testimony, Praise and/as Worship, and Praise as a Duty of Faith. Let’s discuss each of these aspects individually, using scriptural and experiential validation.

Praise as a Self Motivator

Very often, after dealing with the daily routines and stressors of life in this world, one can easily become discouraged and disappointed feeling that there is no reason to be happy or celebrate the day of life at hand. Of course though, the least of wisdom will concur that each day is worth celebration, and we are even advised to rejoice in each day as listed here in scripture:

Psalm 118:24 This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

But, as most Christians are aware of this, that doesn’t satisfy the question of how one gets motivated to do the rejoicing. The answer to that is to praise. At times when despair seems to reign, the best solution is to praise. One should take a moment to fuel their praise by humbling

himself/herself in the presence of God and recognizing the barrage of blessings that they have, especially in comparison to how much worse things could have been. This is because usually one doesn't appreciate how valuable something is until they realize how bad it would be to lose that thing.

Psalm 52:9 I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.

Isaiah 63:7 [*Praise and Prayer*] I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us— yes, the many good things he has done for the house of Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.

Then, as the person praises – not, according to a particular format that someone else tells them they should do, but according to how it flows from the heart (whether it be clapping, playing an instrument, rocking side to side, etc.) – a miraculous event begins to occur. As a person gets lost into the praise, the joy of the praise begins to push out all of those negative thoughts and emotions that have been bogging them down, often times leading to a deeper realm, which is of worship (we shall discuss this later in the text).

It is through this facet of praise that the heart is softened, which prepares the attendee for receiving the word of God. It is through this element of praise that the cold, cloudy days of life become sunny and warm. Only with such an open heart can one truly reap of the full blessings that the Word shall deliver as the heart must be softened to receive it, and praise provides the forceful breakthrough that demolishes the walls of depression in the heart of a believer of Christ. This leads to a more in-depth topic in the realm of praise, which is praise as a weapon.

Praise as a Weapon

In order to understand how praise accomplishes the motivation of an individual, we must first understand how, and that, it is and becomes a weapon against opposition. Though with our natural eyes we see our conflict usually in the form of another person or event that stands in our way and/or attempts to harm our physical or mental safety, we know from scripture that the source of our conflict truly resides in a different realm that is not seen by the natural eye.

2 Corinthians 10:4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Because the root of our conflict is based on a different type of battle than the natural man is capable of fighting with, one must use supernatural weaponry to combat against it, and one major weapon is found in the result of praise.

One of our problems in giving adequate praise is that we don't feel like it, as discussed earlier, but praise is the power that causes the desire to praise more. Once that praise has been initiated, causing motivation, the saint then begins to praise out of joy rather than function because now that spiritual force that was causing the depressive emotions has been defeated. Why? The reason for this is that praises to God carry the power of God, which is like a two-edged sword slicing through the spiritual opposition with complete power.

Psalms 8:2 From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to SILENCE the foe and the avenger.

The word of God, however, includes examples where praise has been used as a weapon on an even grander, much larger scale than in personal motivation. One of the greatest, or most popular, examples is with the walls of Jericho. The scriptures that summarize this point are here:

Joshua 6:2-5;20 ²Then the LORD said to Joshua, "See, I have delivered Jericho into your hands, along with its king and its fighting men. ³March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. ⁴Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. ⁵When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in."... ²⁰When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.

During this battle, the praise is what initiated God's power to cause the walls to collapse. They marched in faith and obedience to the word which had been given and were blessed for it, but the praise was like the ignition switch being turned. It was the power that carried and pushed forth the mighty hand of God. It is the power that initiates our victory in each of our circumstances.

And so throughout the centuries, civilizations have taken notice to the power of praise as well, just as when the invaders of Judah were destroyed amidst the praise of God.

2 Chronicles 20:21-23 After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying:

"Give thanks to the LORD,
for his love endures forever."

²²As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. ²³The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

Even those who have warred without God on their side recognize how powerful, and psychologically damaging a loud and monstrous praise can be to the courage of an adversary. Warriors would develop battle cries that would be shouted in battle, even to the point of the founders of America sending the band in when fighting the Revolutionary War, with drums and horns to declare their victory at the forefront of the massacres.

Praise announces the confidence of a warrior, and intimidates the adversary. It often causes a battle to be won with almost no effort. Likewise, this power of praise for warfare can be used not only on the battlefield of the earth though, but also the battlefield of the mind and spirit, as we go to war daily with our flesh, powers, and principalities. And once this battle has been won, the praise can then become our testimony.

Praise as a Testimony

The fact that we have gone through something hard and lived through it, and then can attribute that accomplishment to the grace of God, is what a testimony is all about. Testimonies are the building blocks of our faith. Our praise, in verbal form, is the method of delivery that we carry this witness to others. This is of such great effectiveness because it makes the witness more personal than reading the word alone. By all means, the word of God is pure power in written form. The historical references are truly inspiring. However, many people, especially

non-believers or those who find themselves doubting the faith, only see the incidences within it as stories and are not able to establish a true connection with them. Often times they will make comments that refer to how long ago these situations were or find it easy to question the validity since it isn't person. But a testimony, the praise of a testimony, puts the word into reality. The testimony alone shows another that whatever circumstance was changed, whatever miracle was performed, or whatever breakthrough that occurred happened to a REAL person. It no longer appears to be just a story that could possibly have been exaggerated, but now it becomes a true and living proof that can be seen with one's own eyes. Now it becomes something that one can put their hands on, reason, and comprehend with their own senses. The praise that is accompanied with that testimony (whether it includes tears running down the face, shouting, dancing for joy, singing, etc.) is what validates the genuine appreciation of the great thing that God has done in the person's life.

How many times in the word of God were testimonies given? They were given numerous times throughout. The Psalms as a whole are filled with, or rather made of, continuous testimonies. Constantly David is singing of how good God has been to Him. He also addresses the power, magnitude, and glorious ways of God through the Psalms.

Psalms 26:6-8 I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O LORD,
⁷proclaiming aloud your praise and telling of all your wonderful deeds. ⁸I love the house
where you live, O LORD, the place where your glory dwells.

Psalms 48:1 Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy
mountain.

Psalms 145:3 Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can
fathom.

In such, it touches the heart of the reader, causing the reader to desire knowing and experiencing the love and awesomeness that is so richly described. Even when Job felt like God was punishing him (though he didn't realize it was Satan torturing him and God allowing him to realize how powerful his faith was) he still praised.

Job 1:21 ... "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."

Eventually, Job's final testimony ended up being one that has been pivotal in the faith of many current believers.

In the New Testament, there are examples where Jesus healed someone and told them to go show the priests as a testimony of what God had done. There were also some occasions where Jesus told those He had healed to tell no one, but the one healed spread the word with joy anyway, and as a result more were inspired to seek after the Lord, increasing His following. One of the most beautiful things about the praise that is a testimony of God though, is that it is not a mere "jump on the bandwagon" phenomenon, but rather a genuine expression of joy. The joy from praising God for His goodness has a way of literally leaping off of a person straight into the heart of another, and lifting their spirits as well, which is what testimonies are all about. When this praise begins to touch this deeper part of our consciousness, it then transforms into worship.

Praise and Worship/Praise as Worship

The first thing to understand before going into the relationship of praise and worship is to understand the difference between the two. Though they both are usually classified synonymously and grouped during the same time period in the order of worship, they do have

distinct differences and functions; yet these different functions end up merging together as an even more powerful force like a good tag team in wrestling.

Praise can be accurately described as an expression and celebration of the goodness of God for Christians. The secular world defines it in the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary: “to glorify (a god or saint) especially by the attribution of perfections.” From the teachings of the Holy Bible, we tend to take it further by adding the elements of music and song. In doing so, the music seems to give the words a sense life, which provides the power that comes from it. Praise often goes beyond the mere action of doing the processes to actually feeling the effects thereof to the point of people getting lost in the flow of it. Praise is used to lift up the name of God, to magnify and glorify His goodness.

It has no required method. It can be done by clapping hands or stomping feet. Sometimes praise is as simple as swaying side to side or as robust as energetic dancing. It can be as intricate as singing throughout each octave of vocal splendor to the words of a beautiful song, or as simple as humming to the beat of an internal song that has no words. It can even be in the form of complete silence, standing or sitting, staring in amazement. However it is done though, it should be done.

The other element, worship, usually stems from praise. Worship can be accurately be described as communicating one’s admiration to God, usually using the vehicle of praise to carry it, which is how they work together. Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary defines worship as “reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power; *also* : an act of expressing such reverence.” Though it sounds cliché, worship is deeper than praise. Where praise uplifts the name of God, worship encompasses the communion with God and His holy spirit. In fact, the

reason the usually go together is because praising causes one to realize just how good God is, and when realizing how good he is one cannot help but worship such goodness.

Worship cannot exist without humility. Even though in praising, the ones leading praise can become arrogant and see themselves as the source of the effect that is happening to so many people, in worship the total opposite is the case. Satan was an angel of praise, and yet his arrogance also caused him to fall.

Isaiah 14: 12-15 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!

You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! ¹³ You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. ¹⁴I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." ¹⁵But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

Yet, worship produces a different result and has a different function which prevents such if in its purest form. Though often it involves similar elements, there is one specific element required which prevents this, and that element is humility. Only in humility can you even enter the presence of God which constitutes worship. Often the Bible links bowing down with worship, as it demonstrates the ultimate form of humility. It becomes a point of recognizing that we are truly not worthy of God's grace, love, and kindness, and we recognize our futility before Him because we realize how minute we really are.

2 Chronicles 20:18 Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the LORD.

Psalms 95:6 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

These particular examples demonstrate the humility of worship. Those that follow not only show the humility (the bowing before the LORD) but also illustrate how it is so often used in conjunction with the element of praise.

2 Chronicles 29:28-29 The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed. When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped.

Psalms 100:2 Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Psalms 66:4 All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you, they sing praise to your name.” Selah

Once this worship has been established, spiritual communion with God occurs for the very presence of God and the Holy Spirit usually enter the place of fellowship, often even to the degree of causing miracles, signs, and wonders due to the life giving power of God. Just as in prayer, worship is a distinct form of communication with God that brings the believer together with Him; only now the breakthroughs and victories are automatic, not because of the action taken by the believer but rather because forces of evil cannot take the literal presence of God. Worship via praise looses the shackles of spiritual oppression and attack because once someone gets that deeply close to God, evil is literally destroyed and eradicated. Praise and worship are truly fundamental in growth, and validate the final point of praise which is of duty.

Praise as a Duty

Even though it is definitely true that we as humans have free will in our lives, and it is also true that we have freedom in Christ to choose certain actions because God desires for our

adoration of Him to be completely voluntary as it proves that it is genuine, praise is one thing that should be considered as morally and spiritually obligatory as fellowshiping with other saints. Praise is not one of the requirements for salvation, which is the ultimate goal of the gospel and the ultimate reward of following it thereof. However, it is one of those automatically occurring expressions that cannot be held back in recognition of the value of love that the believer has received even if only for the single miraculous act of salvation itself. And though it may not be specifically listed as a condition of salvation, it is a command of God and as such should be followed with joy and honor.

In the Levitical law, there were ordinances made where praise as an offering were required. Such an example is in **Leviticus 19:24** where the people were commanded to offer a offering of praise to the LORD in the fourth year. But more specific instruction is also found throughout the Psalms.

Psalms 22:23 You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

Psalms 33:2 Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre

Psalms 47:6 Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises.

Psalms 66:8 Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard;

Psalms 68:26 Praise God in the great congregation; praise the LORD in the assembly of Israel.

The examples of praise being instructed in the Psalms goes on and on. With progression beyond the Psalms though, we find more instruction as well.

Jeremiah 31:7 This is what the LORD says: "Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, 'O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel.'

And of course we take the example of Jesus himself as our guideline for how we are to live, as well as other instruction such as from Peter in the following examples.

Matthew 11:25 [*Rest for the Weary*] At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.

1 Peter 4:16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Therefore, we can rightly assume and accurately conclude that praise should be done and offered by Christians to the one true God that we serve. If we are the light of the world how can those in darkness see us unless we shine? They cannot. Our praise is essential to properly carry the gospel and lead others to salvation. If we cannot show that our faith is worth our appreciation and celebration through our praise, those who need the delivering power to create joy have no motivation to seek it, and shall not be converted. But, when we show them how good our God is through our praise for Him, the desire to share in that joy draws the lost to the cross leading them to accept the wonderful gift of God's love for themselves.

Conclusion

Through various examples and illustrations it is determined that praise is truly a valuable piece of faith that believers truly need in order to fulfill fruitful lives for God. It serves in a variety of different capacities, yet each function serves as a testimony of God's goodness and

glory, and how worthy He is to be praised. If only believers would stop limiting the potential of their faith, by not praising to the extent that God is worthy! If only believers would stop being afraid and ashamed, more concerned with how people will look at them than the breakthrough for their souls! The awesome power found in praise can change lives and situations. The awesome power found in praise can save souls and destroy the attacks of the enemy. If only the saints of God would take the cue from David and praise with all of their heart, despite the attitudes of any who are near! May we as people of God eat, sleep, and live a life of praise, for just as a popular song states,

“praise is what I do,
when I want to get close to you,
I lift, my hands in praise.
Even though my circumstance,
I will praise you while I can,
I’ll praise you at all times.”

There is no question of whether God deserves all of our praise. There is no question of whether praise is important and has power in the lives of the believer. The only question to any, is whether he/she will do it. With hope, they shall.