

CONTEMPLATING THE GREATNESS OF GOD

Most of the Psalms of David were either written for special occasions or they came out of his experiences of life.

There were times when David was in the pits of depression and out of those very dark experiences he wrote Psalms crying out to God for deliverance. Ps. 22, 42, 51, 73

There were other times when David was just bubbling over with love and appreciation for God and praise and worship just poured out of him.

Let's face it there are times when it is so easy to praise and thank and worship God, but there are also times when the last thing we feel like doing is worshipping, praising and thanking God.

And it seems to me that David was in that place when he wrote this Psalm because he telling himself to praise the Lord and not to forget all God had done for him. Which may well mean he was feeling overwhelmed by his present difficult circumstances.

When we choose to praise and worship God while going through a tough time it's what Hebrews 13:15 calls a Sacrifice of praise, because we need to consciously move from a negative attitude position to a positive attitude and that takes a lot of emotional energy. We have to start focussing on God and His goodness instead of our depressing circumstances and that is not easy.

How do we worship and praise God when we don't really feel like it or when we are going through a hard time?

TAKE CONTROL OF OURSELVES

Back in the 80s Campus Crusade put out a little booklet called the 4 spiritual laws that Christians could use to lead others to Christ. At the end of the booklet there was a diagram pointing out the difference between a self-controlled life and Christ controlled life.

Many of us started using the phrase, "Christ controlled life or Spirit controlled life. We even urged people to submit their lives to the Spirit's control or God's control.

But I realised that this is not a Bible concept at all. God does not want to control anyone, no more than we as parents would want to control our children. God wants to lead and direct us, but not control us. If he wanted to control us He would have created robots instead of humans.

If someone seeks to control someone else it is not Christian, it is evil. All through history human beings have tried to control others by forcing them to do what they wanted them to do. They have used slavery, threats, force, even religion.

The only place you find control in the NT is in Gal 6 self-control.

All too often we do not take control of ourselves, we allow ourselves be controlled by our feelings, our circumstances, even by other people.

It may well be that David was going through a hard time and was allowing his depressing circumstances to control his thoughts and feelings. When this is happening you find that more you dwell on your depressing, negative circumstances, the worse they seem.

Most of us carry on conversations with ourselves all through the day. It's called self talk. We talk to ourselves at the rate of 1300 words a minute.

A lot of our self talk is negative and destructive, and the more we listen to this negative self talk the worse we feel.

I don't feel so good today, feel a bit flat, I don't think I'll go to church or the cell group. I don't feel like praying or worshipping God. Anyway He never helps me."

A lot of this negative self talk is inspired by Satan. He is just waiting for things to go wrong or for those times when we are not feeling the best and he turns on the old tape recorder and we hear those old messages we have heard so many times before and we begin speak those messages to ourselves and when we do we play right into his hands and we give him the right to control our thinking and our feeling.

I have the ability to choose how I am going to respond to my feelings and my circumstances. No one can take from me that ability to choose.

III. In 1944 the Jewish psychiatrist Victor Frankl and his family were imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps where they were all killed except for Viktor. Viktor witnessed the most terrible atrocities any

human could ever be exposed to. His fellow prisoners became more and more negative as time went by, giving into hatred, bitterness, hopelessness and depression. But he discovered something that enabled him to survive in those terrible conditions. The Nazis may be able to control our circumstances but they can never control how we think or what we feel. They can never control what our attitude will be. That is one freedom they can never take from us. We alone can choose how we respond to them and to our situation. And Viktor chose not to give into resentment, hatred, bitterness, negative thoughts or hopelessness. He made a conscious decision to respond with love, kindness and optimism.

So David took control of himself and said to himself "Praise the Lord David, let everything that is in you praise the Lord"

FOCUS ON THE LORD

And said to himself, "Now listen here Soul....mind, emotions, will, me "Praise the Lord...."

David speaks to himself....to all that is within himself and says, "Praise the Lord...praise His holy name." Get your eyes off your circumstances, get your eyes off your feelings and focus on the Lord.

III. When Moses was taking the people of Israel through the desert, there came a time when the people began to rebel against God's leadership and God sent venomous snakes among them and many of them were bitten and died. But Moses prayed to God for the people and God told Moses to make a bronze snake put it on a pole in front of the people so that if anyone was bitten by a snake they were to look at the bronze snake on the pole they would be healed and live.

Jesus said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, that everyone who looks to Him and believes in Him may have eternal life."

As the Israelites looked at the bronze snake they were saved, as we believe in the crucified Jesus we are saved. Looking on the OT snake is identical to believing in the NT Jesus. Looking and believing are the same thing.

This is what faith is. Faith is focusing on the Lord. When we fix our gaze on Jesus faith arises in our hearts. Faith is focusing our minds, hearts, our souls on Jesus. Directing our attention to Jesus. Looking to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. Beholding the Lamb of God.

When I look to myself, my feelings, my circumstances I will crash every time. But when I turn my gaze upon Jesus the very things I get totally different perspective on everything. I see things through God's eyes.

Corrie ten Boom used to say, "When you look at the world around you'll feel distressed, when you look at yourself you'll feel depressed, but when you look to the Lord you'll be blessed.

So David says to himself get your eyes off yourself and your circumstances and focus on the Lord and begin to praise Him.

REMEMBER ALL GOD'S BENEFITS

Have you noticed that when you are feeling down, the darkness and heaviness is so all consuming that you lose sight of the positive blessings you have known.

Your thinking often becomes irrational and you talk in generalisations such as, "Nothing goes right for me. No one cares about me. God never listens to my prayers."

I know it's hard to rise above that negative, irrational thinking, but we can choose to wallow in self-pity and allow it to sink deeper into it or we can say, "Enough.....God has been good to me." And begin to count our blessings."

III. A man named Jack Hinton was on a short-term mission's trip to the island of Tobago. He was leading worship at the leper colony there and have asked if anyone had a favourite hymn. "A woman who had been facing away from the front turned around. "It was the most hideous face I had ever seen," Hinton said. "The woman's nose and ears were entirely gone. The disease had destroyed her lips as well. She lifted a stump of a hand in the air and asked, 'Can we sing Count Your Many Blessings?'" Jack couldn't go on. He was overcome with emotion and had to leave the church service. A team member followed him out and said to him, "Jack, I guess you'll never be able to sing that song again." "Yes I will," he replied, "but I'll never sing the same way."

When I thought about God's benefits these are some that came to mind.

He has given us the wonderful gift of life. Why should I even exist, why was I born, why was I born a human being?

He has given us the gift of sight, taste, touch, smell, hearing.

He has given us the benefit of living in a world of great beauty and the ability to be able to look upon and experience the wonders of His creation.

He has blessed us with food, clothing, shelter, warmth, companionship, family.

He has given us the ability to make things, to think, read, communication, enjoy music.

He has given us His own dear Son as the sacrifice for our sins so that we could be forgiven and brought into fellowship with Him.

He has cleaned up our lives and made us acceptable for heaven.

He has sent His Spirit into our hearts assuring us that we are His children and will one day inherit the universe.

He has given us a reason to live now and a glorious hope for the future.

He has poured into our hearts His love, His joy, His peace.

He has made available to us every resource we need to live pure, godly lives that honour Him.

He has given us the privilege of communicating with Him and He with us. The honour of knowing, loving and worshipping Him.

These are just some of the benefits that come to my mind when I choose to remember.

This is what David did as he directed his attention to the Lord.

He forgives all your sins. ALL.

If I didn't believe that I couldn't continue as a Christian let alone a Pastor. The promise in 1 John 1:9 is that "If we confess our sins....all unrighteousness" There is no sin that is too vile and evil for God to forgive.

He heals all your diseases.

There is no sickness, no disease beyond His ability to heal. In fact the Gospels tell us Jesus healed everyone who came to Him for healing which means He would have healed every disease facing mankind. In that sense He heals all our diseases.

He still heals every disease today, and people all over the world can testify to that. I know people who have been wonderfully healed by the Lord. But the fact is that there are many believers who have prayed for healing and yet not been healed and that is something I don't have the answer to. And no-one has been able to give me a satisfactory answer to that one. But genuine faith will love, serve and follow Jesus without having all the answers.

I know that one day every true believe will be perfectly healed when Jesus returns and I am content to wait until then. In the meantime I am happy to know that whatever happens to me be it sickness or health, my life is in His hands. And I believe that nothing pleasant or unpleasant can touch my life unless God allows it for His glory and for my good and I am at peace with that. . *Romans 8:28. "God causes all things to work together for the good..."* Pleasant or unpleasant.

He redeems your life from the pit. This is the promise of resurrection to all who believe in Jesus.

Crowns you with love and compassion.

III. Karl Bart, the brilliant theologian was visiting a University in the US and one of the students asked him, "What is the greatest truth that has ever crossed your mind?" Kara Bart looked at the student and said, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

That He should love us is totally irrational because of the way we have treated Him. We have ignored Him, rebelled against Him, rejected Him, mocked and ridiculed Him, cursed His name, broken His laws, abused His kindness...and yet He continually extends His love and compassion toward to us.

Who satisfies your desires with good things.

James says that "Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the father of heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows."

All given as gifts of grace.

So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's

David is speaking about what happens to an eagle when its body ceases to secrete the oil that keeps its feathers water proof. The feathers break, its eyes become dim, its strength diminishes and its coat looks threadbare. Disease is setting in and death will come it doesn't take action. It flies to an isolated place and finds a sheltered spot. It plucks out every diseased feather and a new ones grows in its place. When the process is complete it spreads its wings and soars into the sky like a new bird.

As we believers continue to remove the morally and spiritually diseased areas of our lives the Spirit of God replaces them with the fresh fruit of the Spirit.

Though outwardly we may grow old yet inwardly we are begin renewed every day.

When we take the focus off ourselves and our circumstances and focus on the Lord and what He has done for us.....what a difference it makes.

III. Allen Gardiner was a missionary in South America last century. He experience many difficulties and hardships and in 1851 died at the age of 57 from disease and starvation. When his body was found his diary lay nearby. It recorded his struggles with hunger, thirst, wounds and loneliness. The last entry in this little book was written with a very shaky hand and it read, "I am overwhelmed by a sense of the goodness of God."

Where was his focus.

Martin Rinkat was a pastor in Germany during the 30 years war in the 1600s. In one year he buried 5000 of his parishioners. His town was ravaged by war, death and economic disaster. In the midst of this very dark time he sat down at his table and wrote this grace for his children. Now thank we all our God...."

In spite of the trials his focus was on God.

CONSIDER GOD'S WORKS

v6. He works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.

Some people think that God treats everyone the same. He does not. If you read the OT you will see He is biased....biased towards those who are oppressed and disadvantaged.

v7. God would far rather show love and compassion than anger. He holds back His anger as long as He can
before He enters into judgement.

v9. He doesn't hold grudges.

v10. He doesn't treat us.....At heart we are all rebellious, deceitful, proud and self-centred and we have all sinned against God. If He treated us as our sins deserve He would wipe us out completely. But what did He do. Because his love for us is so great He sent His own dear Son to take the punishment we deserve, to serve our sentence, to die in our place.

Ill. Princess Alice the daughter of Queen Victoria watched her son dying of diphtheria. Because the disease was infectious, the doctors told the princess not to kiss her son or she would contract it herself.

As she watched her son struggling to breath the princess forgot herself and took the boy in her arms. As she held him, her son gasped, "Mummy kiss me." Without thinking of herself she tenderly kissed her sonr, contracted the disease and died a few days later.

God loved us so much, He put aside His own thoughts of self-preservation and in Christ at the cross He became infected with our sin and that damning evil killed Him.

And when Jesus did that God removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west.....how far is that. They never meet.

If you have come to Jesus and believed in Him and received God's forgiveness...you will never meet your sins again, God will never ever confront you with them again. They are gone forever.

v13. As a Father.....

God understands our humanity, our limitations not just because He created us but because He has experienced first hand what it is to be human.

In Jesus God entered a human body and was subjected to everything you and I go through.

This is a truth that makes X so unique.

Hebrews 4:15-16 "For we do not have HP who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Peters joke but dust.

CONSIDER YOUR FUTURE

v15. For the person without the Lord there is no future. Their life has no meaning, no purpose.

It is just like grass or a flower that appears for a time and then vanishes and is forgotten.

III. I often walk around cemeteries and look the headstones and read all the nice things people have said about them. And I ask myself what did they achieve that is of any eternal value...nothing. In a few generations they will be forgotten and whatever they did will be forgotten.

But for those who trust in, fear and obey the Lord His love will be with them forever. Eternity is theirs.

v19. No matter what is happening in this world, in your life and circumstances, God is still on the throne. He is still in control. His rule extends over everything.

PRAISE THE LORD

When we praise the Lord we are saying in effect. "No matter what is happening to me, no matter how I am feeling, no matter what is happening around me or in this world.....God is greater than all these things. I choose to look beyond these things to God alone and to stand on His promises, believe in His Word, Hope in His appearing and give Him all the praise and the honour and glory.

How is your outlook today?

What are you focusing on? Feelings, circumstances, others.....look beyond them to the Lord and continue to keep looking to Him and faith will grow within you stronger and stronger and He will do in you what you could never do yourself.